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SINNER OR VICTIM ?

BY DORA DELMAR.



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DORA DELMAR.

“ Not my own
The hand which builds this wall between our lives;
In its cold shadow, grown
To perfect shape, the flower of love survives.”

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SINNER OR VICTIM?

CHAPTER I.

THE DIAMOND ROBBERY AT RODENHURST.

It was the dusk of an early day of "chill October," and the fire that burned in the ample grate of a large, handsomely furnished room on a ground floor in King's Bench Walk, Temple, looked cheerful and home-like; the more so as, at present, the glow of the dancing flames was the only light in the apartment.

The occupant of these chambers must have been among the lucky few to whom the bar is bread instead of a stone, for the appointments denoted the possession of abundant means.

The floor was well, even richly, carpeted; the furniture was all of oak, and a book-case filled with books occupied one entire side of the room.

Added to these evidences of prosperity were the goodly piles of briefs on the large center-table. One of these lay open, and a chair pushed back from the table seemed to indicate that the document had been recently under discussion.

Successful? Any ordinary newspaper-reader could tell you that Vere Lorraine was one of the most successful men of his day, for there was hardly an important case in which he did not hold a leading brief.

But then, gifted though the man was with an unusually handsome person, and the silver tongue of a Follet to enhance the effect of his eloquence, he came to the bar with every social advantage.

He was of ancient family, the grandson of a peer, and left Christ Church with brilliant honors and a fellowship; so when he took silk before he had been ten years at the bar, no one was surprised. Such a career is rare; but

then also rare are the qualifications and social advantages combined which make it possible.

Two men occupied Mr. Lorraine's rooms on this particular afternoon; one lounged comfortably in an arm-chair near the fire; the other leaned carelessly against the mantel-piece.

The profession of the first would have been easy to determine; the hair worn somewhat longer than is usual, the clothes carried negligently, the tie loose, proclaimed the artist as much as the fine-cut face, in which the imaginative organs were more prominent than the intellectual.

The profession of his companion was not so easily determined. Few, if any, would have supposed him to be a lawyer, any more than they would have given him more than thirty years in age, though he had in reality reached his fourth decade. A tall, slight, aristocratic-looking man, with a bearing and *tout ensemble* that seemed superficially rather to suggest St. James's Street than the Temple, was the brilliant advocate nicknamed at the bar "Handsome Lorraine."

But a face and head displaying such intellectual power, such force of will, such strength of purpose, as this man's, is not seen often where the chief occupation is to kill time.

Lorraine's features were as finely cut as his companion's, and more strictly handsome; and the soft, dark mustache shaded a mouth which in repose betrayed lines of suffering; the eyes, large, dark, and peculiarly brilliant, possessed those combined qualities of penetration and secretiveness which nature bestows on some few temperaments, and habit makes into a second nature—a useful quality for a lawyer.

There had been a short silence between the two men, which the younger broke.

"A very odd case," he said. "What's your opinion of it? That's why I popped in upon you—I should like to know what you think!"

"I can scarcely answer you fully, Hazlemere," returned Lorraine, his eyes fixed on the fire; "the facts are not all before me."

Ulric Hazlemere burst out laughing.

"There spoke the lawyer," he said. "Why, the whole case was before the magistrate yesterday—you have read it?"

"Every line," replied Lorraine, smiling a little, "and I read this—that a certain Miss Beryl Carolan, whom I never saw, though I have heard of her as a great beauty, is staying at Rodenhurst with my friends the Rodens—that Miss Enid Roden, in a fit of girlish enthusiasm for this lovely visitor, tells her where the famous Roden diamonds are kept—that shortly afterward the diamonds disappear—that Miss Carolan is accused of stealing them—that she was seen under suspicious circumstances prowling about the house—that none of the jewels is found in her possession—that nobody knows, after all, who she is—only that she has lived very much abroad. These are the facts deposed to."

"And very ugly facts!" exclaimed Hazlemere. "Don't you think it looks very black against Miss Carolan?"

"Very black; but there may be other facts not yet discovered."

"Oh! you're too cautious for anything!" cried the young painter.

"No—only just and careful. *Mon cher*, you are like the rest of the world; a *prima facie* case is made out—at once you jump to a conclusion, which in six cases out of ten is a wrong one, and in three others premature. Miss Carolan's own conduct is strange; she does not, according to the evidence, either admit or deny—but then, that is, perhaps, a point in her favor."

"I don't follow you."

"As a rule," said Lorraine, "an innocent man, charged with a crime, denies it; and so does a guilty man, unless taken red-handed; but Miss Carolan was not taken red-handed; yet it is stated that when accused of the theft, she was silent, offered no opposition to the searching of her luggage, and, in effect, took up an entirely negative position. Before the magistrate she makes no defense, reserving it for her trial."

"But you don't mean to say," said Hazlemere, "that you think her behavior is consistent with perfect innocence?"

"Not on the face of it—no. I repeat that the case against her looks very black; but then neither you nor I know all the facts; or, to speak more accurately, we ought to hold our judgment until we see what the defense will be."

"Well, I don't think it was very wise in the magistrate

to admit her to bail," said Hazlemere. "She has plenty of time to truck the diamonds away, supposing she took them, and I can't help thinking she did."

"If she did," returned Lorraine, "she got rid of them before the loss was discovered. It was a very imprudent thing of Enid to make a *confidante* of a stranger—a close tongue makes a wise head; though that is hardly a proverb one can expect a girl of twenty to adopt practically. On one point, however," he added, "I have made up my mind—and that is, that Roden ought never to have prosecuted."

"Why not? Probably Miss Carolan is a case-hardened adventuress, who has been in similar snarls before, and got out of them, Heaven knows how. Through her lovely face, no doubt. *You* ought to be a thorough cynic, Vere. You're bad enough sometimes, and now, have you been falling in love on the q. t., and so becoming romantic about the sex in general?"

Lorraine laughed and ran his fingers through his curly dark hair.

"No, no, Hazlemere, I'm not in love, thank Heaven! and I dare say this girl is case-hardened; still, it's a horrible thing for a young woman to stand in the criminal dock; and I, for one, could never put one there unless her crime were so monstrous and inhuman as to put her beyond the pale of pity or sympathy. Sometimes," he said, slowly, turning his gaze to the fire again, "it is those who have seen the most of human depravity, till their faith in human nature is well-nigh sapped, who can feel the most deeply for some of those who come to the felon's dock."

"Lorraine," said the painter, after a pause, "you're of too fine a fiber for a lawyer; I've often thought that."

The other looked up and smiled.

"Have you?" he said, dropping into a chair near him. "Ah, no; the majority of cases that come before us don't call for sentiment or compunction; but now and then, I confess—well, never mind, I won't confess anything; but certainly I never regret having come to the bar."

"You've no cause, you lucky dog!" sighed Hazlemere, giving the fire a vigorous poke. "It's we poor painters who have to regret that we ever took up our trade."

"Don't pull a long face, Hazlemere. It's just possible I may be able to get you a commission to paint a portrait."

"What a brick you always are, Vere! Whose portrait?" exclaimed Hazlemere.

"You shall know all about it when the matter is settled," replied Lorraine. "Don't build upon it—that's all."

"I won't—that is, I'll try not to."

But Hazlemere knew very well that his friend never spoke of a subject like this at all until he knew that the matter was pretty well in his own hands; so, not unnaturally, the young artist *did* build upon the hope held out, for Vere Lorraine never failed any one.

"I wonder," he said, after a pause, "if the Rodens will want you to lead in the prosecution?"

A shade fell on Lorraine's fine face.

"I hope not," he said, shortly.

"You don't like holding a brief against a woman?"

"No; especially in such a case as this."

"I wonder," Hazlemere went on, "that you never came across the girl—Beryl Carolan, I mean. I'm not such a swell as you are—but you might have met her. They say she is so lovely. I suppose her father, or uncle, or whatever he is, must have had some introductions?"

"Why, yes; the girl was so well received. The uncle never goes out; he is lame or bedridden, I forget which. What a come-down for her! for if she is acquitted of this charge, she can never be thoroughly cleared. She will lose her present position."

"Do you think she will be acquitted?"

"I can't say. If the evidence against her is not strengthened, I would undertake to get her off. Very likely she would escape, anyhow, unless convincing evidence turns up. Juries are wonderfully susceptible to female beauty, and judges not as impervious as they would have the world believe."

Hazlemere laughed, and rose.

"Though not quite as bad as artists, eh?" he said. "Well, I must be off, or you'll have to work into the small hours."

"No, not to-night," returned Lorraine, rising also. "I shall read for another hour; I want to master that brief"—pointing to the table—"to-night, and then I shall levant."

"I should die under half the work you do, Lorraine."

What nerve-power, as the doctors call it, you must have! Good-bye; see you soon again, I hope."

"Good-bye, old fellow. Yes; I may drop in on Sunday, if you're at home."

"Take care I am if there's a chance of your coming."

"Then I'll say for certain, and I may have news for you. Will you tell Forster, on your way out, to come and light the lamps?"

Hazlemere nodded, caught up his hat, and went out, and a minute later a clerk came in and lighted the lamps and replenished the fire.

"Forster," said his master, as the young man was going out, "you can leave at seven."

"Very well, sir, thank you."

Lorraine turned to the table and sat down, but for a minute he paused, and a strange, far-away look came into his dark eyes.

"Was it all a dream?" he said to himself, but not audibly. "Sometimes it seems so real, at others as vague as a sick man's fancy. Would to Heaven I could *know*!" He pressed his hands tightly to his temples. "Bah! it *must* have been a dream—even as I try to grasp it, it fades from me—only a dream!"

He pulled himself together, and drawing the brief toward him, bent over it, reading quickly, yet grasping every detail with the readiness of a mind at once large and acute.

CHAPTER II.

LILLIAN BERYL CAROLAN.

AT five minutes to seven there was a knock at the door, and Forster entered the room.

"A lady wishes to see you, sir," he said.

Lorraine looked up in some surprise. He saw ladies sometimes at his chambers accompanied by their solicitors; but as counsel only take instructions through a solicitor, Lorraine might well wonder what a lady coming alone could want with him.

"Did the lady give her name, Forster?" he said.

"No, sir; I asked her, but she told me I was only to say a lady wanted to see you, if you could possibly spare her a little time."

"Very well; show her in, Forster."

"And shall I wait, sir?"

Lorraine glanced at the clock and smiled.

"No," he said, "I need not keep you."

"Thank you, sir."

Forster withdrew after placing a chair, and, opening the door wider, ushered into the room, with his best bow, a lady.

A lady, young, tall, and slender, richly clothed in a long black velvet redingote trimmed deep with sables; on her head a black velvet Spanish hat with drooping feathers.

But the girl's beauty—she seemed no more than a girl—would have shone conspicuous in the apparel of a peasant; beauty, too, of an unusual type, short curling hair of a reddish gold, straight black eyebrows, eyes of the rare sapphire-blue, which, under the shade of the long black lashes, appeared as dark as the lashes; a complexion pure and clear as opal, which, if it had a fault, was in being too pale. And yet the charm of that countenance lay in something so far more potent than loveliness of form and coloring, that Lorraine, even in the first inward start of wondering admiration which the sight of rare beauty provokes, felt that, with irregular features and a comparatively insignificant presence, his visitor would have possessed something that marked her out from other women, and excited an interest wholly unique.

The lady paused near the door as if somewhat embarrassed, and returned Lorraine's bow with a bend of the head that struck him keenly as having in it a curious touch of humility and shame. Perhaps, flashed through his mind, she had expected to find an older man that he was, and scarcely felt prepared to explain herself to him; but he said with the gentle courtesy habitual to him—even to witnesses—rarest of counsel:

"Pray be seated; I am at your service."

A sudden flash of color across the girl's face, a sudden compression of the lips, as if she had received a shock of mental or physical pain; then in a soft, low voice, speaking hurriedly:

"Thank you, very much. I hope you can really spare me a few minutes, Mr. Lorraine?"

She seated herself as she said this, and Lorraine resumed his own seat.

"Many minutes," he answered, "and with the greatest pleasure, if I can help you in any way."

"Thank you," she said again, "that is very kind of you to speak so." She was not looking at him, but straight before her, and his penetrating eyes were covertly watching her striking face. "I am sure you can help me—if you will—that is," she went on, "if I am wrong in coming to you, you will tell me so and forgive me; I don't know what is right in England, and my case might be too small for a great advocate like you."

The closing words of this speech explained something in intonation, appearance, and manner that was not English.

Lorraine replied:

"If I can help you, I assuredly will. Is it advice you require, or assistance of counsel—of an advocate?"

"I want both," she said, glancing at him a moment. "You do not know me, Mr. Lorraine?"

It seemed an odd question. He smiled.

"No; I have never had the pleasure of seeing you before."

Again a quick color rushed to her face, and faded as abruptly.

"I am Beryl Carolan," she said.

Vere Lorraine did not start outwardly; his visitor might have said: "I am the Queen of England," and he would have preserved his self-control; but mentally he did start; the announcement went to his heart like a stab; there seemed no sort of agreement between this more than beautiful girl and crime; but he answered directly:

"Do I understand that you wish me to undertake your defense?"

"Yes; that is, unless you have any objection; you are a friend of the Rodens—"

"An advocate has nothing to do with friendship," interrupted Lorraine, gently. "I will hold a brief for you, if you wish it; I can not, indeed, professionally, refuse to do so, if you instruct your solicitor to come to me."

"Thank you," said the girl in a whisper. She seemed to struggle with herself for a moment; then she looked up.

"My solicitor?" she repeated, "then—was I wrong to come to you? I am very sorry!"

"Pray, don't say that. By the rules of the profession, the case must be laid before me by a solicitor, and it would

anyhow be necessary for you to employ one, as there are certain details and formalities which can only be carried out by a solicitor. You could not be expected to know all this; and perhaps since you are here, I can be of some assistance to you."

"Ah! then," said Miss Carolan, hurriedly, "I am taking your time; I must not do that!"

"My time is at your service, Miss Carolan," said Lorraine, quietly; "do you know of any solicitor in whom you have confidence?"

"No; I have had no need of law till now," returned the girl, her eyes drooping.

"I can recommend you to a man, skillful, careful, and in every way trustworthy—a client of my own."

"You are very kind. I shall be so grateful," said the girl; "but I would like you to know—"

She stopped.

Lorraine came to the rescue.

"I am ready," he said, "to hear anything you wish to tell me."

Beryl Carolan's brow cleared a little; but her sensitive lip quivered.

"Then you would prefer that I stated my case?" she said, with some hesitation. "Only what I meant just now is that I—I have no defense."

A second's pause.

Then said Lorraine:

"I don't quite follow. You plead 'Not Guilty'?"

"Is that only a formal plea?"

"It depends. According to the practice of the English law, you must plead either 'Guilty,' or 'Not Guilty.' If you refuse to plead, a plea of 'Not Guilty' is entered on your behalf; but that does not entail upon you the necessity of calling any witnesses, or making any practical defense, if you do not choose to make any, or are not in a position to do so."

"Yes—I understand; thank you."

Her head was drooping now; she spoke very low, and added:

"But then, if I make no defense—you might not wish to—"

"I have nothing to do with your guilt or innocence," said Lorraine, though he only felt the professional truth of

this statement. "My business is to prove that, *according to law*, you are innocent—that is, that you ought to be acquitted. Will you tell me the case from the beginning? and I will give you my opinion on its merits. Forgive my asking this of you; I have read the evidence before the magistrate; but I want to have the story in your own words, and to ask you a few questions."

He saw her wince at these last words, and it made his heart ache with a sharp, bitter pain; he added, with exceeding gentleness:

"You must feel, Miss Carolan, as if every word spoken to me were spoken to your confessor; at the same time, should I ask any question you prefer not to answer, I will not press it. It will make no difference in my undertaking your case, though it may affect the line I shall take. You went, I think, to stay at Rodenhurst early in September?"

The girl gave him a quick, grateful look, and replied at once:

"Yes; I met the Rodens in town, and Enid Roden took a great liking for me. They asked me to stay for a fortnight at first, and when it came to an end they asked me to remain another week. Enid used to talk to me a great deal, and one night she told me where the diamonds were—"

She stopped, flushing scarlet.

Lorraine asked:

"Had you already any knowledge of this?"

"No; I did not know it until that night. Two days later—on the —th," the girl went on, with an effort, "the jewels were missing. Mrs. Roden's daughter May went to put away a brooch her mother had been wearing the evening before, and she saw that the cabinet had been opened—it was a cabinet in the music-room."

"And Miss Roden saw you in or near the music-room at a late hour the night before the discovery?"

He was watching her keenly, as he spoke, under the shelter of long lashes, which enabled him to appear unobserved, while not a change of feature, however slight, escaped him.

There was a change in Beryl Carolan. She lifted her eyes—eyes so clear yet so unfathomable—and gazed straight before her, and there was a subtle change in her tone, too, a something hard and desperate, as she replied:

"Yes—I was there—near the music-room."

"Enid Roden was surprised to see you?"

"Yes; there was no reason for me to be where I was."

"You decline to give any reason?"

"Yes. There was a hue and cry raised about the jewels. Mr. Roden said every room must be searched. I did not oppose mine being searched. I said they could do what they liked, and they did; but they found nothing. Then Mr. Roden charged me with the theft. All his evidence is quite correct; I did say that I would not utter a word one way or the other. He sent for the police, and I was taken before the magistrate."

She did not display any emotion in relating this cruelly painful story; it seemed as if she had succeeded in crushing down all outward show of feeling, though Vere Lorraine was convinced that inwardly she suffered tortures.

Surely never did a woman, young, beautiful, well-born—she was certainly of gentle blood—cultured, tell so strange a tale to her counsel—a tale in which she was accused of a base crime, the more heinous in that it was an abuse of hospitality; and yet her only defense was an obstinate silence. Was she guilty? It was not often that Vere Lorraine was puzzled, but he was puzzled now.

One thing was clear—that Beryl Carolan could, if she chose, tell something about the disappearance of the diamonds; but was it her own guilt, or the guilt of another she strove to conceal? or was she an agent—a thief in act, but not stealing for her own personal benefit?

That she was alone responsible, Lorraine did not for a moment suppose. Why, in this case, should she hesitate to deny her guilt? The course she took was exactly calculated to fasten suspicion upon herself as the actual perpetrator of a crime of which, while there were doubtless other accomplices, she must, therefore, bear the responsibility.

Lorraine sat silent and thoughtful for a few moments after his client ceased speaking; when he spoke he did not look covertly in her face, though still, as before, he watched her.

"Your defense, then, Miss Carolan," he said, "is wholly negative. That is, you offer no evidence in your own favor—you simply challenge the prosecution to prove your guilt?"

"Yes—that is it," she said again, with that quietly reckless, unemotionless tone and manner.

"At the same time," Lorraine went on, "you admit certain damaging facts—namely, that you were told where the jewels were kept, that you were found late at night in the immediate proximity of the music-room, where you had no legitimate business?"

"Yes," said Beryl Carolan, a shade of anxiety in her tone but no change of color.

"I will speak frankly," said Lorraine, after a pause, that he might gain perfect self-control; for though he had had often to tell cruel truths to clients, and had keenly felt the pain of doing so, the necessity had never cost him so much as it cost him this evening. "As your counsel, I am bound to be perfectly honest with you. The case against you is legally strong—morally, all but overwhelming; but if no further evidence crops up against you, I have no doubt of obtaining an acquittal"—he saw her breast heave with a quick, silent breath—"because, however strong the assumption of guilt, no jewels, or implements such as must have been used to open the cabinet, were found in your possession; your position and surroundings, also, favor the contention that you are not a likely person to commit such a crime as that charged against you. I may add, Miss Carolan, that your sex, youth, and personal advantages will influence the jury very considerably."

She did not say a word, turning her head a little aside, and setting her firm lips close. But, still and silent though she was, Vere Lorraine had seen too much of human nature, and studied it too carefully, not to perceive that she was undergoing a sharp mental struggle.

In a minute or two she turned round again and rose to her feet.

"I am very, very grateful to you, Mr. Lorraine," she said. "I thought—I feared I might be condemned; I feel safe now—legally, I mean; and you have been so kind—"

"I have only done my duty, Miss Carolan."

"There are so many ways of doing one's duty," said she; "and yours has been a generous way."

"It is good of you to say so," Lorraine answered. "Let me give you this, please, before you go."

He drew out a card of his own, and wrote beneath his name, "Mr. Greenwell, 201 Lincoln's Inn Fields."

"I am sure," he added, handing his client the card, "you will find Mr. Greenwell all that I have said of him."

"Thank you a thousand times! Shall I leave you my address?"

"It might be as well."

Beryl Carolan took out a dainty card-case, and gave Lorraine her card.

The address was "97 Hanover Street, W."

"Good-evening," she said, bowing, but not offering her hand.

Lorraine stepped forward to open the door for her.

"Have you a cab or carriage waiting?" he asked; "or can I call a cab for you?"

"Thanks, I have a hansom waiting. Please don't trouble," as he followed her out.

But Lorraine only smiled, and went with her to the cab, giving her his hand to assist her into the vehicle. He fancied—it might have been only fancy—that there was a second's hesitation on the girl's part before she resigned her hand to him. Perhaps a sense of shame oppressed her, feeling as she must that her position in regard to him was a humiliating one; but if this was so, Vere Lorraine had no mind to let her suppose he, on his part, accepted the position, for when she had taken her place in the cab and bowed adieu with a soft "Thanks, so much," he held out his hand.

"Good-bye," he said, gently, with that touch of reverence in his manner which is not in these days common among even well-bred men toward women.

There was a flash in the girl's violet eyes, a sudden quiver of the lip, but she gave him her hand with an almost impulsive movement, and it trembled in the man's strong clasp—the clasp that was more than kindly—tender, chivalrous. Erring though she might be, she was still a woman, and he a man, bound to judge her leniently—to extend to her mental, if not actual protection. Did Beryl Carolan feel all this?

When Lorraine turned away she threw herself back in the corner of the cab, covering her face, striving, but striving now in vain, to choke down the passionate sob that rose in her throat. Perhaps she had been under even stronger tension during the last half hour than Vere Lorraine wist of. Was a sense of guilt added to the anguish

she endured? How should he dream what possibilities her life had once held? How should he divine what "might have been?"

But when he returned to his chambers he did not resume the reading of the brief which Beryl Carolan's entrance had interrupted. That must do by and by, or to-morrow. He could not detach his thoughts from the woman who had come to him that day with so strange a tale. He could not shut out from his vision a face whose mere beauty might well have made a deep impression on any man; but it was something in itself, apart from and independent of beauty, though enhanced by it, that chained Vere Lorraine's interest.

"I would not," he said inwardly, as he sat by the fire and gazed in the dying embers, "have held a brief against that girl for the world. An adventuress—a thief! No, no; there is a mystery in her life worth the unraveling. Shall I ever reach the last thread? Best not try; the task would be a dangerous one for me. And yet there are people who, having once come into your life, can never leave it."

He rose abruptly, as we do when trying to shake off some painful train of thought, and going to the table, took up the card his client had left.

"'Lilian Beryl Carolan,'" he repeated. "The name seems to suit her. What has her past been? What can her future be?"

He put the card in his pocket-book, and suppressing a sigh, began to tie up his brief, leaving it for the next morning. In a few moments the lights were out, and Vere Lorraine was on his way to his bachelor chambers in Albemarle Street.

CHAPTER III.

THE RODEN FAMILY'S OPINIONS.

"COME, Enid, mamma and I are both dying for some tea; do pour it out, there's a good girl."

And the speaker seated herself on a low footstool in front of the fire; footstools being, in her opinion, far more comfortable than chairs or settees.

It was the richly furnished drawing-room of a house in

Kensington Gore. The rain was pouring without; but that only made the bright fire within more welcome, and the aroma of the tea more fragrant.

A lady of about fifty, stout and gray-haired, the light-hued eyes kindly in expression, the mouth a little hard, was seated in an arm-chair at one side of the hearth, knitting in hand; opposite to her, beside a small table, on which stood the tea equipage, was a girl of perhaps twenty, or a year or two older, tall and slightly made, with a profusion of dark hair gathered above a low, broad brow and those gazelle-brown eyes which express more sentiment than intellect.

Enid Roden's was a face not actually beautiful, yet one might call it lovely.

May, a year younger than her sister, was of a wholly different type. She had the same dark hair and brown eyes; but her eyes were full of laughter, and her whole countenance was bright and animated. There was more intelligence, too, in this face, the rosy lips firmer. Enid might be, to the majority of people, the more attractive; but a keen physiognomist would probably decide in May's favor.

Enid roused herself at her sister's appeal.

She had been leaning back in her chair, looking thoughtful and preoccupied.

"I beg your pardon," she said; "I am sorry I kept you waiting. I was thinking."

"And I, too," said Mrs. Roden, laying down her knitting in her lap. "I almost wish now that I had tried to persuade your father not to go to Mr. Lorraine."

"I wish," said Enid, half to herself, "that he had not charged Beryl at all."

"So do I," said May, overhearing, "with all my heart."

"What is it you do with all your heart, May?" asked Mrs. Roden.

"You know, mamma—wish that papa hadn't prosecuted Beryl."

A shade—almost a frown—came on Mrs. Roden's face.

"It is no use going over that ground again," she said; "the thing is done, and your father would not withdraw from it if he could. I feel very deeply for the girl's position, but I really can not see any excuse for her."

"We don't know what her temptations were," urged

Enid—"how she has been brought up—anything—even if she did steal the diamonds."

"*Even!* My dear Enid, you always look at things from the sentimental, and not the common-sense, point of view. There ought to be no temptation strong enough to make a well-born, cultivated girl turn thief, and so shamefully abuse the hospitality extended to her; and Miss Carolan's silence only goes the more to prove her guilt. She is simply sheltering some one else—some lover, perhaps. I can not feel too thankful that we got rid of her. Heaven knows what depravity underlay so fair a surface."

"Oh, mamma!" cried Enid, "Beryl is not depraved!"

"How can you tell, my dear? You don't know enough of the world to be a judge in such matters. You were dazzled by Miss Carolan's beauty and her talents, and never saw below the surface."

"Nor did you, mamma," said downright May, with nineteenth-century irreverence, though she did not speak rudely, "nor papa, nor any one."

"I admit that," returned Mrs. Roden, sipping her tea. "I liked Miss Carolan very much, but there were always some things about her I did not approve."

"What things, mamma?" asked May.

Enid was silent.

"You always want to know everything from A to Z, May," remarked her mother.

She was one of that numerous class of persons who always make discoveries, "after the event;" who *thought* there was something queer about so-and-so, when some one else had found him out; who never *did* quite like such-and-such, when she was discovered to be guilty of some grave fault.

These persons do not like being brought to book, inasmuch as, in most cases, they have no definite indictment to prefer; and though not consciously untruthful, are, in effect, striving after a cheaply earned repute for unusual penetration by uttering generalities.

May perfectly well knew her mother's foible, but she was wicked enough to reply:

"You never said anything against her, mamma, except that she had very little faith in human nature."

"And surely," said Mrs. Roden, catching at the plank thus stretched out to her, "that is not a nice feature in so

young a woman. It looks as if she had been accustomed to mix with a bad set of people, and judged every one by them."

"You might say the same of Vere Lorraine, mamma," interposed Enid.

"Hardly, my dear. Lorraine is double Miss Carolan's age—which makes all the difference."

And here mamma decidedly scored.

May laughed.

"How ridiculous it seems," said she, "to talk of Lorraine being forty! I never can get it into my head that he is more than thirty. Fancy his remaining single all this time!"

"Some early disappointment, perhaps," observed Enid, raising a small hand-screen to shelter her face from the fire, but her cheek flushed a little.

"Romantic Enid!" said May, handing up her cup for some more tea. "You ought to be a novelist. I believe you are responsible for mamma's notion about a fugitive lover of Beryl Carolan's."

"I am sure," said Enid, earnestly, "I never meant to imply that Beryl was anything than above reproach—morally, I mean."

"I know you didn't, Enid; but you must allow when you come to think of it—one doesn't at the time—that Beryl never told us anything about herself; her belongings, and all that. She had traveled pretty well all over the world, and mixed with very swell people; but all that is outside. We don't know now *who* she is, what her people are, whether she was born in England or abroad. And do you remember the private theatricals, when she taught us the minuet, and our stage-manager, who, you know, had been a ballet-master, said she must have learned dancing and ballet action professionally?"

"Your tongue goes too fast, May," said her sister, rather coldly. "I remember all that, but I don't see the particular use of recalling it. It is ridiculous to suppose that Beryl had ever been a dancer."

"One can not say what she might have been," said Mrs. Roden. "I recall what Mr. Stalling said on that occasion, and that Miss Carolan refused to act. She probably felt that she would too clearly prove herself professional."

"Suppose she *had* acted?" exclaimed May, anxious to

redeem her indiscretion about the dancing. "All sorts of swells go on the stage in these days."

"But they don't learn ballet-dancing," said Mrs. Roden.

"No," retorted her daughter; "more's the pity. They don't learn anything, and are only professional because they're well paid for doing their work very badly."

A knock at the hall door followed immediately on this sally, and diverted the current of thought from Beryl Carolan's possible antecedents to the present.

"It's papa!" said Enid; quickly adding, under her breath: "I hope Mr. Lorraine has declined to hold a brief!"

A heavy step came up the stairs, the drawing-room door was opened, and there entered a tall, stout, full-faced man with bushy whiskers, and a type of a face one would recognize anywhere as belonging to a member of parliament. Mr. Roden looked a little flushed, a good deal annoyed, and walked straight up to the hearth—May rising as he approached—planting himself on the rug after the manner so dear to Englishmen, with his back to the blaze, and his ample person shutting it off from every one else.

"Well, Sydney?" said his wife, anxiously.

Enid's heart beat hopefully.

"Well, dear," said Mr. Roden, "Vere Lorraine declines to hold a leading brief for the prosecution."

"Declines!" exclaimed his wife; "you asked him as a courtesy, but you might have sent him a brief—"

"As women usually do," said Mr. Roden, interrupting in his turn, "you jump to conclusions. Lorraine declined my brief simply because Miss Carolan's solicitor this morning retained him for the defense."

There was a trio of "Oh's!" Enid clasped her hands in her lap, at once relieved and vexed; relieved she well knew why; Vere Lorraine's persuasive eloquence would not be employed against the woman who had so captivated Enid's affections; but the vexation the girl could not have defined; she was hardly conscious of its existence.

Mrs. Roden spoke first.

"Was it Miss Carolan's idea to retain Lorraine, Sydney?"

"I don't know—very likely; but Lorraine did not say so. I can't admire her good taste," added Mr. Roden, "in selecting a friend of the family to defend her."

"But he's a comparatively recent friend, papa," interposed May; "and perhaps the only man she knew of, being, as she is, a foreigner."

"Considering Lorraine's fees," remarked Mrs. Roden, rather dryly, "one would think Beryl Carolan can be in no need of money."

"Well, mamma," exclaimed May, "it could not have been poverty that made her take the diamonds—if she did take them. Look how perfectly she always dressed, and the exquisite jewels she had."

"Perhaps acquired in the same way," said Mr. Roden, grimly. "I suppose Lorraine will make a point of her not being in need of money. As for Beryl Carolan, she knew what she was about, going to Vere Lorraine; she's an adventuress—no doubt about that; she heard you all—you girls especially—talk about Lorraine, and that he was a very handsome fellow, unmarried, and rich, and she means to try and hook him."

The heat of that fire must have been intermittent, for it was once more necessary for Enid to raise the screen before her face. She was conscious now of that feeling of vexation and of its cause. She did not like that Beryl Carolan should be thrown in Lorraine's way, under circumstances, too, calculated to arouse his sympathy; and he was a man always tender and compassionate toward women.

Poor Enid! was she allowing her head to run too much on thoughts of the handsome advocate?

Mrs. Roden took up her husband rather irritably, glancing at Enid.

"Really, Sydney, how you do run on! If I had made such a speech you would have told me a woman never can distinguish between private and professional intercourse, and counsel would have enough to do if they fell in love with every pretty client."

"I should do no such thing," retorted her husband—though he probably would—"not if you were talking of this particular case. Beryl Carolan is a pretty woman; she has beauty enough to turn the head of any man, without taking any trouble either; and a man doesn't leave his nature behind him, though he may put another over it, when he goes into his chambers or his office."

Certainly Mr. Roden was right, and his listeners felt that he was; but this did not make his remarks any the more

palatable; May resented them principally on Beryl's account.

"I don't believe Beryl's that sort of girl," she said; "we never saw anything to make us think so."

"We saw just as much as she chose us to see," said Mr. Roden. "Don't talk nonsense, May—what can you know—at your age! Give me a cup of tea, Enid. Anyhow, the thing can't be helped; I shall leave it to Boscombe to choose his leader. I suppose Lorraine will get the girl off, and juries always are tomfools when a good-looking woman's in the dock."

Of course Mr. Roden exempted himself from the tomfools, though it was just possible that, were he in the jury-box, he would have been no more strictly impartial than his brethren—always supposing the disordering magnetism of female beauty in the dock.

No one dared, however, to hint this.

So Mr. Roden prosed away, his wife bearing all the burden of boredom, as it is the mission of wives to do, while Enid sat silent and thought her own thoughts, and May sought solace in the last new "shilling dreadful."

The dinner-bell came in as a reprieve to the three women, and they retired with unusual alacrity to dress.

"Thank goodness!" said flippant May, as she ran upstairs. "No more diamonds till dinner-time; but if they don't come in with the soup, they'll make their appearance with the fish."

And they did.

CHAPTER IV.

WILL THE MYSTERY EVER BE SOLVED?

LOUD laughter, the clinking of the glasses, a *charivari* of men's voices—these are what the policeman on his beat in Grafton Street, Mayfair, heard between twelve and three one night, or early morning. He knew from whence they proceeded; he heard them often from the same quarter.

You would have thought there were a dozen men to make such a clatter; but there were only five, including the host, enjoying a *petit souper* in the chambers of Mr. Herbert Gresham—fashionable man about town, who was always in debt, and yet always seemed to have plenty of

money; who spent his days in killing time—he rose about noon, but, to make things even, rarely retired before three A. M.—and not a few of his nights at gambling-clubs; who, in fact, might have been described in the terms once applied by a seaman to Gilbert Gurney, the hero of a now forgotten novel published under that name: “A useless, purposeless wretch living without an object.”

He sat at the head of his well-furnished table, a fair, good-looking man of six- or seven-and-thirty, bearing the hall-mark which late hours and a dissolute life set on their victims; and the men around him were more or less of his own type, save one, the painter, Ulric Hazlemere.

He was not behind-hand in the enjoyment of the hour; but he alone drank sparingly, and when “chaffed” for so doing, had a ready answer for the jester.

“Now then, Rowcliffe,” cried Gresham, to his right-hand guest, “fill up—fill up, all; I’m going to propose a toast!”

The glasses were filled, and somebody cried:

“Her full name, mind, Gresh—no initials.”

“No need for ‘em, my son,” returned the host, flushed with wine, and though sober according to “bachelor supper” canons, scarcely to be so described from a more strict standpoint—“no need—I drink to the acquittal tomorrow of Lilian Beryl Carolan!”

“Hurrah! hurrah!” echoed round the table, and glasses were clinked and emptied amid an uproar that would have done credit to an Oxford supper-party at the Clarendon.

Rowcliffe was the first to make an intelligible remark.

“But acquittal’s a foregone conclusion, eh, Gresh?”

“Ought to be with her beauty and my cousin Lorraine’s silver tongue.”

“Is she such a beauty?” asked a young man at the end of the table.

“Is she *not*?” asked Gresham, staring. “You clearly haven’t seen her, dear boy.”

“No, I haven’t, and I don’t know much about her, except hearing of this case. You forget I’m only just home from the Rockies.”

“Oh! ay, grizzly hunting and all that sort of thing. Well, it’s just this way. In the May of this year,” Gresham continued, as if reading out of a book, all the others laughing, “Mr. Justin Harwood took a house in

Hanover Street; Mr. Harwood, elderly, lame, spends lots of time on a sofa; his niece, Beryl Carolan, simply divine. Harwood certainly a gentleman; Miss Carolan certainly 'born to the purple.' They come from abroad—have a few introductions. Harwood starts in grand style, house inimitable, girl dresses like a picture; they keep a brougham and a pony-carriage—she drives like Diana; they entertain—the most perfect *petits diners*, at homes, *soirées*. She plays, sings—talks with anybody in his or her own language, etc. Society raves about her; she is courted, fussed over—till the collapse comes—and, as they say on the stage after a long story, 'the rest you know.' "

"H'm! Accepted, after all, very much on their own showing," observed the questioner.

Gresham shrugged his shoulders.

"People aren't so particular as they used to be, Standish. Of course, Act II. will be either Bohemia or flitting—the former, I hope."

But Hazlemere's voice did not join in the chorus of "same here!" He observed, when there was a momentary silence:

"Yes, I suppose theft is the unpardonable sin."

"Of course," said Gresham, "it's vulgar—there's no getting over that—even theft like this, to the tune of some forty thousand pounds. Are you going in for 'high-falutin,' Hazlemere?"

The painter laughed.

"Not I," he said; "but, by Jove!" he replied, thoughtfully, "I'd like to get at the bottom of that mystery."

"The Great Diamond Robbery!" cried Rowcliffe, who had written comedies which were failures. "Startling sensational drama in five acts. Act I. The robbery. Act II. Innocence under a cloud. Act III. Innocence in outer darkness. Act IV. Innocence looking up a bit. Act V. Innocence triumphant—the villain discovered—'my own!' 'my adored!'—a scream—a rush—lovers embrace—villain secured in darbies—all serene! Curtain!"

"But as it is real life," said Hazlemere, when the shouts of laughter provoked by Rowcliffe's "bill of the play" had subsided, "there will probably be no *dénouement*. The Great Diamond Robbery will sink into the limbo of

forgetfulness, and the villain will enjoy the proceeds of his achievement unrestrained by darbies."

Was Hazlemere a true prophet? Would the mystery of this inexplicable crime remain always a mystery—to exercise the Grevilles of a future generation as the robbery of the queen's necklace exercised the chroniclers of a past day?

Was Lilian Beryl Carolan sinner or victim—or both?

CHAPTER V.

THE EVIDENCE AGAINST BERYL CAROLAN.

SOCIETY had been duped by a beautiful adventuress, and was exceedingly indignant thereat. The men who had placed their hands and names at the disposal of Beryl Carolan felt that her refusal, galling at the time, had procured them a lucky escape. How shameful it was for "such women" to foist themselves upon an immaculate and unsuspecting world! for there could be no doubt of the guilt of the accused; it was clearly understood a week before the trial came on that her defense was simply negative. She would call no witnesses, attempt no proof of innocence, except challenging the prosecution to prove her guilt. So society treats its favorites; and there were necessarily not a few women who rejoiced in the "blotting out" of a too successful rival.

The police were, naturally enough, convinced that Miss Carolan had an accomplice; but all their best efforts were fruitless in discovering that individual, though large rewards were offered by the Rodens for the arrest of any one concerned in the robbery; nor could the faintest trace of the missing jewels be found.

"It's as neat a plant as ever I had to deal with," said one well-known detective, "and those who are in it are no new hands. Miss Carolan must have got rid of the jewels the very night she stole 'em—the very hour, I should say. It wasn't the first thing of the kind she'd done, or helped in, because it's my opinion that she didn't do it herself; only let in the actual thief, and made things smooth for him generally."

In the course of their inquiries the police tried to find out something of the antecedents of the accused, which

would, in all probability, throw light on the present; but here again they were baffled.

They discovered certain facts, but those facts were not to her detriment; but beyond a given point neither they nor sundry busybodies who tried to rake up the annals of the past for their own delectation, or to furnish gossip to the papers, were able to go. Beryl Carolan was first heard of in Vienna, where she and her uncle were living in good style, and keeping open house, their guests being principally of the artistic professions. There was a rumor, which could not be substantiated, that Beryl had acted and danced in Italian theaters; but she was clearly not of the class from which dancers are drawn; next, uncle and niece were in Paris, then at Berlin, lastly in Madrid, and from Madrid they came to London; but everywhere they were "in society," nowhere did they appear as adventurers, nor was there a breath against the fame of the girl, whose rare beauty made her an object of admiration and homage.

Scotland Yard shook its head and was sorely puzzled, and the world wagged its ceaseless tongue over the case; and the "swells," male and female, strove their hardest to obtain privileged seats in court for the day of the trial.

Vere Lorraine had only seen his client once again since his first interview with her, and then in the presence of her solicitor, Mr. Greenwell; but he had never felt so much personal anxiety for success as he felt in this case, not even in some cases in which he knew his client to be innocent; and he knew that this very anxiety was born of his deep interest in the matter, for under ordinary conditions he would have been perfectly confident, and was really confident now.

"You think there can not be a doubt of a verdict in our favor?" asked Mr. Greenwell, the evening before the trial.

"Not a doubt," returned Lorraine; "and you see, as we call no witnesses, I have the advantage of the reply."

"That's a great advantage," said Mr. Greenwell; "though I don't think Dixon's reply could injure the effect you will produce. I wish I could feel as sure of our client's innocence as of her acquittal. What is your opinion, sir?"

He had never asked that question before. Lorraine betrayed not the slightest emotion of any kind.

"If I tell you," he said, "you will smile, maybe, and

think that Miss Carolan's beauty has run away with my judgment."

"No, sir; your brain is too well balanced for that."

"Thank you. I think, then, that there is a story behind this story—that my client is acting under compulsion."

"But that still she is a thief?"

"No," said Lorraine, quietly; "I don't believe she is."

"H'm! You mean that she is hiding the guilt of some one who is?"

"Possibly," replied Lorraine, more reservedly.

"But she must have betrayed the secret of the place where the jewels were kept?"

"That does not follow. Nor—if she is under compulsion—is it that of a strong will ruling a weak one. Miss Carolan has a will that no one could overrule; she is a great deal more than a beautiful woman—she is a woman of very remarkable character."

"Don't take to studying it, sir," said the solicitor, smiling now, and shaking his head.

"I am too busy for that, Mr. Greenwell," returned Lorraine; but when he was alone again, he said to himself:

"What will become of her after this trial? Will she remain here and sink into a lower social sphere—that is inevitable—or go abroad, and pass beyond my ken—out of sight?"

He stopped, biting his lip hard, and turned abruptly to some work that lay waiting for him. He felt instinctively that it was best not to think just now about his beautiful client, since he could not do so in a strictly professional manner.

The brougham that bore Beryl Carolan and her solicitor to the Central Criminal Court the next morning had to make its way through a large crowd waiting to see what they could of those concerned in the trial, and to hear the first news of the proceedings.

"Will you let me call for you, Mr. Greenwell?" Beryl had said to her solicitor; "I should be pleased to do so in any case, and I have no one to go with. My uncle is infirm, and of course I have no friends now."

She said it, not bitterly, but in the most matter-of-course manner; yet there was an almost terrible pathos in the words and in the facts that lay behind them.

Not one friend to stand by her in her hour of humiliation had the girl who had been courted, and flattered, and made much of, whose love men had sought, whose gifts of mind and person women had envied and admired.

But no one would care to be seen with her now; her crime was a vulgar crime; and vice may be condoned, but vulgarity is the unpardonable sin.

So the prisoner and her solicitor drove up together, and entered the crowded court amid a buzz of excitement evoked by the former.

For just a moment the girl felt staggered, and a faint color crossed her pale cheek:

“ All the court around, and walls, and roofs,
And all the earth and air, were full of eyes,
Eyes!—eyes!”

But the anguish passed quickly—the flush faded into almost deathly whiteness, and she walked steadily to the dock, and took her place, her eyes drooping a little, but not downcast.

She would wait awhile before she sought for faces that she knew; it might unnerve her now. Her heart was throbbing so heavily, and she must not fail. If Vere Lorraine had been here, the ordeal might have tried her less.

But he came in almost the minute after she had entered the dock. For a second their eyes met.

“ Fear nothing!” his look said; and hers answered, “ I have no fear—none!”

Then Lorraine turned to speak to his junior, and Beryl let her gaze travel over the sea of faces.

There were the Rodens—all together—father, mother, Enid, and May. There were two or three of the servants at Rodenhurst, who had been subpoenaed; and there, on the bench and scattered over the court, were many whom Beryl knew well. Men she had danced and flirted with; women by whose sides she had sat in their carriages on the Row, chatted with them at balls or at Christie's. They seemed to belong to another world now; the men she might meet again, but the women—

She looked once again at Enid; she thought that the girl had been weeping.

“ Fancy her really loving me!” said Beryl to herself.
“ It seems so strange.”

Judge and jury took their places.

There was a certain amount of bustle, and rustling of briefs, and talk, and then silence settled over the throng, and Mr. Dixon, a tall, stout man, quite a curious antithesis in every way to handsome, aristocratic Vere Lorraine, rose to open the case for the prosecution.

Miss Lilian Beryl Carolan was, he said, a young lady of, he believed, foreign birth and extraction; at any rate, partly so. She had lived a great deal abroad—a wandering life, and owing to her uncle's state of health, a very independent life. She appeared to have moved sometimes in aristocratic circles; at others to have mixed with the more Bohemian element.

Every one knew what artistic society in Vienna was. (Probably not a third of those in court did know—Mr. Dixon among them.) Miss Carolan's personal charms, and artistic and other gifts, made her a great favorite, and wherever she was she reigned the queen of an admiring circle. She and her uncle came to London, where the same adulation followed her, and she was received with open arms by a society not so strict as it should be in demanding credentials from those who seek its suffrages.

Nothing, after all, was known of Miss Carolan's remoter antecedents; who, and what she was, how those means were acquired which enabled her to keep up with the style of things prevalent in Mayfair, and preside at *réunions* in Hanover Street which became famous. Perhaps society was to blame; but it could not be denied that Miss Carolan bore upon her no apparent stamp of the adventuress. She was a beautiful, cultivated, and most fascinating woman, and she played her cards with consummate skill.

Mr. Dixon then went on to describe how the Rodens first met Beryl Carolan, and were attracted by her—Miss Roden especially. How Miss Carolan “so worked it as to obtain an invitation to Rodenhurst,” and how, when there, she “wormed” from Enid Roden the secret of the music-room.

The Roden diamonds had been famous for generations; some of them unique, and though valued at forty thousand pounds, three times that sum could not compensate the family for their loss, since several of them were heir-looms.

Counsel then commented strongly upon the suspicious

circumstances surrounding the disappearance of the jewels; Miss Carolan's presence late at night near the music-room, her refusal either to admit or deny anything. One would expect an innocent woman to meet such a charge with amazement and indignation; instead of which she received it with a kind of stony recklessness, and her readiness to submit to her apartments being searched simply proved that she had taken good care to get rid of the jewels, being aided, without doubt, by an accomplice, though every effort to find that accomplice had failed.

Beryl listened to this speech attentively, though she did not seem to give much heed to it, and without any change of countenance, even while Mr. Dixon was doing his best to discount her career, and produce the impression that it was, in truth, though not in appearance, the career of an adventuress.

Lorraine took a few notes, but he had a singularly clear and retentive memory, and would often pick up all the points of an opponent's speech without having made a single note.

The first witness was Enid Roden.

She rose trembling to enter the box, flushing scarlet, then turning very white.

Poor Enid! Her hands shook as they held the book, and it was some minutes before she ventured to raise her eyes.

Mr. Dixon's first questions only related to the manner in which the Rodens met Beryl Carolan, her being asked down to Rodenhurst, etc. He proceeded:

"You became, I believe, greatly attached to Miss Carolan?"

"Yes."

"You were very much with her, and talked confidentially to her—as young ladies will?"

"Yes."

"And she encouraged your confidence, no doubt?"

"I can not say that; she was always kind and sympathetic; but I don't think she ever sought my confidence."

"Or gave any in return?"

"No; she was very reserved about herself."

"After she had stayed a month in the house with you, you knew no more about her than at the beginning?"

"No."

"She was asked originally for a fortnight's stay, was she not?"

"Yes."

"At whose request was the time extended?"

"At mine; my sister joining in the request. My mother, too, wished to have her stay."

"Give us your account of this, please?"

"Two days before she was to leave I spoke to my mother. Miss Carolan was not in the room; my sister was. My mother said she would be delighted to keep Miss Carolan another fortnight, and she herself gave the invitation."

Vere Lorraine smiled secretly. Mr. Dixon had scored a point here for the defense.

That gentleman quitted his ground and passed on to the jewels.

"The diamonds were kept in a cabinet in the music-room. Will you describe that cabinet?"

"It was a cinque-cento Italian cabinet, very massive, of ebony and silver. Two keys were required to open it, and the locks were different; no key not made for them would open them. The cabinet was always supposed to contain ancient manuscripts and music, and there were some in it."

"The music-room was a good deal used?"

"Oh, yes."

"How many people knew where the diamonds were kept?"

"Only the family—not even my mother's maid."

"Who had the keys?"

"My mother. She always wore them hung round her neck."

"The servants are all trustworthy?"

"They have all been years with us."

"Were you under any obligation to keep this secret—any vow, for example?"

"No; it was thought safest that no one but the family should know where the diamonds were kept. My father put them in the cabinet when he was first married."

"Was their hiding-place kept secret, then?"

"I don't know."

"When was it you told the prisoner where the jewels were kept?"

"Three days before they were stolen—one night it was."

“Relate the circumstances to the Court, please.”

“We had been out to a dance, and went to Miss Carolan’s dressing-room. She was alone. I admired some of the jewels she had worn, and then I said something about the diamonds—I forget what. She did not seem to notice much. I said, ‘I want to show you the necklace.’ I had the keys on me then—round my neck. I had to put away a brooch my mother had been wearing. I went out and fetched the necklace, and Miss Carolan said it was very beautiful, and told me to take it back to my mother. Then I said it wasn’t kept in mamma’s room, but in that lovely old cabinet in the music-room.”

“Did Miss Carolan make a remark?”

“Yes; she laughed, and said, ‘What an odd place to keep jewels!’”

“Had she noticed the cabinet?”

“Yes, when she first came. She admired it very much.”

“Was anything more said about the jewels that night?”

Enid colored painfully.

“Yes; I asked Miss Carolan not to tell any one what I had said about the cabinet. She said, ‘Was it a secret, then? Oh, Enid, you should not have told me!’ She promised not to say anything.”

The witness went on, in answer to questions:

The night of the robbery they had all been out to a party. Mrs. Roden wore a pendant belonging to the diamond set, which was not put away that night. The music-room was in the opposite wing to Miss Carolan’s apartments; it was near her (witness’s) room. About half past one she (witness) was going to her room from her sister’s, when she met Miss Carolan in the corridor, close to the music-room. Witness exclaimed, “Beryl!” in astonishment. Prisoner wore a loose wrapper. She started on seeing witness, but did not seem much surprised. Witness said, “Were you coming to my room?” and the prisoner replied, “No; good-night, Enid,” and turned away. Witness thought this behavior strange, but had no suspicion. She heard no sound.

Was Enid going to escape cross-examination?

No; Vere Lorraine rose.

“Miss Roden,” said the courtly advocate, “I shall not keep you long, but there are a few questions I must ask you.”

Enid bowed, coloring a little.

She did not mind being cross-examined by Vere Lorraine, and she would be only too glad if anything was elicited from her which would tell in Beryl's favor.

"When the original term of Miss Carolan's visit was drawing to a close," began Lorraine, "was anything said on the subject between you and the prisoner?"

"No; not a word."

"Your request was entirely spontaneous?"

"Entirely. We were all—my sister and I especially—very fond of her, and we wanted her to stay."

"Did Miss Carolan ever speak to you about the famous diamonds—at any time, I mean?"

"Never. I remember saying something about them to her once in a London ball-room, and she replied, 'Oh, yes; some one asked me if I had ever heard of the Roden diamonds; and I never had until then.'"

"Was it your impression that she in any way 'fished' for an invitation to Rodenhurst?"

"She certainly did not. My mother suggested asking her; and when she did ask her, Miss Carolan at first hesitated, and thought she was engaged. Then she looked in her pocket-book, and found her engagement was for the previous week."

"When Miss Carolan admired the cabinet did she ask any questions?"

"No. She said at once it was a cinque-cento, and knew much more about it than I did. She did not ask if anything was kept in it."

"Was she often in the music-room—alone or otherwise?"

"Never alone, I should think; often with me and others. She sung splendidly, and of course every one liked to hear her."

"You were entertaining guests all the time of Miss Carolan's stay?"

"Up till the last week—a succession of visitors. I have the visitors' book with me."

It was handed up, and Lorraine glanced at it, but asked no questions upon it.

"Now, Miss Roden, the night you told the prisoner about the diamonds being kept in the cinque-cento cabinet, did she in any way lead up to the subject?"

"No; it was just as I said before."

"She had a quantity of handsome jewelry, had she not?"

"Yes; lovely out-of-the-way things."

"That will do, thank you."

May followed her sister. She described going to the cabinet the next morning about ten o'clock to put away the pendant, and finding that it had been broken open, and the diamonds stolen. She went at once to her parents, and her sister, who was present, almost fainted. She was asked to explain her agitation, and then related what she had seen, and that she had told the prisoner where the jewels were kept. Witness went with her father to the prisoner's apartments; she had a suite—sitting-room, dressing-room, and bedroom. Prisoner admitted them herself, and did not seem surprised, which struck them both. Mr. Roden was very angry; but he said he had come to ask an explanation. Prisoner said: "What about?" and Mr. Roden answered: "The diamonds—they are stolen!" Prisoner said, quietly: "And you think I stole them? Well, you can search if you like."

"She did not show any astonishment on hearing that the jewels were gone?"

"No; my father said: 'Great Heaven! you can not mean that you are guilty!' And Miss Carolan turned away and replied: 'Do what you like. I neither confess nor deny.' She threw her keys down on the table, and left the room. The police were sent for and the rooms thoroughly searched; but nothing was found that did not belong to Miss Carolan.

Lorraine did not cross-examine this witness, nor the next, an expert, who deposed that the cabinet had been opened in a most accomplished manner. It would be most difficult to deal with, the two locks being utterly dissimilar, and most peculiarly made; they would have baffled an ordinary burglar; the operator must have been a past-master in the art, and have employed very fine tools.

At this stage the court adjourned for luncheon.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEFENSE.

AFTER luncheon Mr. Roden was called into the witness-box, and Lorraine's junior whispered:

"Shall you cross-examine him?"

"On one or two points—assuredly," was the reply.

Sydney Roden corroborated his daughter May's evidence, and added that the prisoner appeared to him to "put on a mask of callousness." The house was searched throughout, but no clew to the mystery was discovered. There were no footmarks outside; the music-room window was high, and there was a flower-bed beneath it; the mold was damp, as it had rained early in the evening. The window could only be reached by a ladder. There were no signs anywhere of an entrance having been made into the house. He always went over the house himself at night and saw to bolts and bars.

Lorraine rose again to cross-examine.

"Mr. Roden, how long have the diamonds been kept in the cabinet?"

"For twenty-five years—ever since I was married."

"Where were they kept formerly?"

"In my dressing-room; but my wife thought this unsafe, and I placed them in the cabinet."

"Did any one besides your wife know of their being in this place?"

"My valet, since dead."

"Indeed! your valet knew it? Any one else?"

"My younger brother," replied the witness, with a touch of hesitation in his manner.

"He is not living, I believe? He died abroad?"

"Yes; about fifteen years ago."

"Now, Mr. Roden, I am sorry to have to ask this question: Was not your brother Anthony what is called wild—a free drinker, for one thing?"

"I can not deny that."

"A man who spent much time among betting-men and the like, and finally went abroad under not very creditable circumstances?"

"Yes, that is so."

"Is it not just possible, Mr. Roden, that a man of this description may have betrayed to one—or to any number—of his loose companions where these jewels were kept—either willfully, or when not sober?"

"Yes, he might, certainly. But my brother, though a free drinker, was not a drunkard."

"But he was, at any rate, a man of not much principle—not a safe custodian for a secret?"

"I allow that. The secret was not told to him—he guessed it."

Again Lorraine had scored. Though the facts he had elicited might only the more strongly mark the contention that Beryl had an accomplice, they decidedly discounted the assumption of the prosecution, that the prisoner alone knew the secret, and was, therefore, of necessity, a primary actor in the robbery.

Beryl's counsel did not ask Mr. Roden any more questions, nor did he cross-examine two or three servants who were examined, and whose evidence was of no sort of value one way or the other. Mrs. Roden's evidence was simply corroborative; but Mr. Dixon went out of his way to ask her some questions tending, in his opinion, to injure the prisoner's cause with the jury.

"You had, I believe," he said, "some private theatricals while the prisoner was staying with you, under professional management?"

"Yes. We played the 'School for Scandal' and the 'Country Girl.'"

"And Miss Carolan taught the minuet in the former to those who were to dance it?"

"She did."

"The stage-manager was present at some of the rehearsals, and made a remark about the prisoner's teaching and dancing?"

"Yes. He said she must have been a professional; no amateur could dance it as she did."

"Did she take any part in the acting?"

"No; we wished her to, but she refused. But she coached my two daughters, and 'made them up' on the night."

"She seemed perfectly *au fait* with all these things?"

"I was told so. I did not see much of it. The manager said he was sure she had been on the stage. I never asked her."

"You thought it would be an insulting question?"

"Well, I don't know; it might be so, certainly."

"What have these questions to do with the case?" whispered Lorraine's junior.

The other smiled.

“A good deal—from our point of view. Let him run his tether till the judge stops him.”

Which his lordship did almost immediately.

“Really, Mr. Dixon,” he said, “I can not see how your case is affected by such questions. They are a needless waste of public time.”

Mr. Dixon bowed, submitted, and dismissed his witness, who was not cross-examined by the prisoner’s counsel.

The case for the prosecution was now closed, and there was a breathless pause, an intense hush of expectancy. Vere Lorraine looked at his client. She stood erect, with her violet eyes drooping a little; her creamy skin was perfectly colorless, but she was self-possessed, outwardly calm. How wonderfully beautiful she was! How perilously beautiful for the success of the prosecution! Her features and expression somehow brought vividly to Lorraine’s mind Delaroche’s exquisite “Beatrice Cenci.” His heart burned within him as he rose. Were this girl ten times guilty, he could feel only bitterest sorrow for her; he could not condemn her.

Lorraine, like all practiced orators, glanced over his audience before he began to speak. He knew—what gifted speaker does not know?—that he could chain and entrance them. His lack of personal vanity made him unaware of the influence of his handsome countenance and striking presence.

“How the fair aspect, ere a sound was heard,
Prepared the way for the melodious word!”

So for a moment’s pause; and then he addressed himself to the jury, and the silvery voice, not loud, but clear as a bell, and finely inflected with every change of mood, filled the crowded court, and would have charmed all hearers even if the subject-matter had not been of deep interest.

But in this he was also fortunate; he was pleading the cause of a woman, young, friendless, and most beautiful, and his eloquence had never seemed more brilliant and persuasive than it did to-day.

Yet Vere Lorraine’s style was always pure and noble, absolutely free from the mannerisms and clap-trap which mar so much good speaking at the common-law bar.

Perhaps he felt that he stood in no need of such adventitious aids; certainly he never employed them; and yet no man at the bar could so influence a jury.

He began by admitting that he had no witnesses; it was one of those cases in which a defendant seldom has witnesses, but relies upon the weakness of the prosecution; and in this case the prosecution utterly broke down in attempting to fasten the guilt of robbery upon Miss Beryl Carolan.

Their evidence was entirely founded on assumption; nothing was proved, and all the surrounding circumstances were in favor of the prisoner's innocence.

It was shown that though she had heard of the "Roden diamonds," she did nothing to obtain an invitation to Rodenhurst, and the request to prolong her stay was equally shown to have come spontaneously from her entertainers.

Though she was nearly a month in the house, she never spoke of the diamonds—yet she might easily have found out where they were kept long before by "pumping" Miss Roden in a manner which that young lady would never suspect.

The cabinet was opened by an expert, but it was most unlikely, though it was just possible, that a young girl, brought up as Miss Carolan had been, would be an expert in the use of burglars' tools.

An accomplice was suggested, but there was no proof of an accomplice. Doubtless a clever burglar opened that safe; some one did it, and stole the diamonds; but where was the proof of Miss Carolan's complicity?

She was found near the music-room under suspicious circumstances; her conduct on that occasion and throughout was suspicious, said the prosecution.

Well, allow that; but on the other hand, not one stone was traced to her possession, not one burglar's tool or article of a suspicious nature. She had got rid of them, but how? You can not make a victim, and then build her into a wall of assumed circumstances; that is neither law nor equity.

Again, if Miss Carolan's demeanor was inconsistent with innocence, was it consistent with guilt? Assume her to have committed this crime; a person capable of such an act was not one to shrink from untruth, and she would be perfectly aware that the assertion of innocence could be safely made. Yet, when an easy and plausible falsehood was put into her mouth by Miss Roden, she refused to

avail herself of it. Instead of indignantly denying the charge made against her, she declined to speak. To account for such conduct, you are again bound to have resort to assumptions.

He (counsel) was not called upon to account for his client's behavior; his duty was to see that she was not convicted without clear and irrefragable proof of her guilt.

Then the prosecution had made strenuous efforts to discover some shady antecedents of the prisoner; but had signally failed. She was found moving in good society, associating with women of irreproachable life. He scarcely knew why his learned brother was anxious to demonstrate that Miss Carolan had been an actress and a dancer. If he proved these facts—what then?

He (Lorraine) knew something of both artistic and aristocratic life, and he knew that not a few women in the former world compared favorably with not a few in the latter. The prisoner was not in need; she was not in debt; she was wealthy, and occupied a position which she was not likely to risk for the sake of twice the amount at which these diamonds were valued. Such collateral considerations must not be lost sight of, but he (counsel) placed his chief reliance on the lack of convicting evidence.

His peroration was masterly. He made no sentimental appeal; he based his demand for a verdict of acquittal solely on the grounds of law and equity. The peroration was short, terse, and brilliant; a triumph of close argument in language picturesque, but utterly free from rhetoric, and when the speaker sat down, not only the public, but the bar burst into applause.

Lorraine, externally calm, whatever his real feelings, turned to his junior.

"The verdict is ours," he said.

And Beryl? For the first time there was a flush in her cheek; her heart was throbbing to suffocation. She glanced instinctively to Lorraine and met his look—it said, "Acquitted!" and her gaze sunk; there was a mist before her eyes, a humming in her ears.

Mr. Dixon leaned back and folded his arms.

"Lorraine has got the case," he said to his junior.

At half past three the judge began his summing-up. It was fair and impartial, but as the legal minds in court at

once saw, in favor of the prisoner. A little before four the jury retired to consider their verdict.

Enid, deeply excited, clung to her sister's hand.

"They will acquit her," she whispered, "won't they?"

"Yes—for certain. Didn't Lorraine speak splendidly?"

Enid drew a long breath, and nodded; she felt choking. How wonderfully Beryl kept her self-control!—though she was deathly white, she looked so calm and unconcerned.

The jury returned after only five minutes' absence, and the clerk asked the usual question. The foreman replied at once:

"We find the prisoner at the bar—not guilty."

In the midst of the cheering that followed, and the noise made by the ushers in quelling it, Beryl raised her eyes to Lorraine's face with such a flash of light in their blue depths as startled him and made his heart leap up with a wild bound. The time was yet to come when he understood that look; but her words were low and broken.

"Thank you," she said. "I am very grateful—you have saved me from worse than death."

He laid his hand for a second on hers, as it rested on the edge of the dock. He could not answer her; he could command his face just now, but not his voice. He was agitated as he had never been in all his professional life before; he had no sense of triumph as an advocate; the thing was that he had saved Beryl Carolan—saved her from the inexpressible horror of a punishment, the more terrible in her case in that he felt it was undeserved.

Did Beryl see, or by the subtle sense which is keener, more unerring than sight, perceive that her counsel was deeply moved? Her lips quivered for a moment; but she turned her face aside, and gave, or seemed to give, her attention to the few words spoken by the judge.

Then all was over, and she was free! free to go out into the world with a branded name, a legal acquittal, a moral condemnation, yet still free from prison and degrading associations and hideous monotony.

"Do you hear the crowd outside cheering?" said Mr. Greenwell to her.

She shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

"If I were a man," she said, "or old and ugly, the mob would probably have gone the other way. Can't I wait until the crowd have gone?"

"I will take you round by the judges' entrance," said Lorraine, quietly. "Come with me."

"Thank you so much," said the girl; and Lorraine put her hand on his arm and began to make his way through the crowd, now breaking up and beginning to disperse.

"Mr. Lorraine is taking Beryl out," said Enid to her sister; "I must speak to her."

"Papa will be very angry, Enid."

"I don't care."

Enid, like many women not strong of will, was brave as a lion where her affections were called into play.

She rose, and contrived to push her way to Beryl's side, touching her on the arm.

Beryl started, and turning, flushed crimson as she saw who had touched her.

"Oh! Beryl!" said Enid, passionately, and holding out her hand, "I am so glad—so glad you are acquitted! Do forgive me—they made me speak!"

Beryl's eyes were blind with tears.

"I never blamed you," she said, softly. "You have always been generous to me. Good-bye, dear!"

She gave her hand for a moment, withdrawing it quickly.

"Oh! Beryl, not good-bye!"

"Yes," said the other, almost sternly, "it must be that!"

She passed on, and Enid found herself pulled back by her father, but gave no heed to his angry expostulation with her for speaking to Beryl Carolan.

There were some who pressed forward to congratulate Beryl on her acquittal, but she shrunk from them haughtily.

"Victory is always innocent, isn't it?" she said to one lady, with a bitter irony that effectually checked any further advance, and pained though Lorraine felt, he could not but sympathize with his client.

In her place he would have acted as she did. If these people really believed her innocent, why did they not come forward to stand by her while her fate hung in the balance?

No one could seriously argue that the trial had cleared up anything that before was doubtful; that the verdict

"Not guilty" recorded more than what in Scotland would have stood as "Not proven."

Lorraine had already dispatched a messenger to send Miss Carolan's brougham round to the judge's entrance, and it was standing ready when he and his client reached the door.

"Drive round by the back ways," said Lorraine to the coachman, "so as to avoid the crowd."

He handed Beryl into the carriage, and she turned and gave him her hand, her eyes drooping, her color rising.

"Once more," she said, slowly, "thank you! You can never know fully how grateful I am to you!"

Still holding that little hand in his own, Lorraine said gently:

"Don't speak of gratitude; it is due from me to you. Good-bye! Heaven keep you!"

He longed just to touch his lips to this girl's hand before he released it, but that would have been a grave breach of honor; he was her counsel, bound to keep within the limits of his trust; but he could not help adding those last words, and they, at least, were not out of place. They were spoken very earnestly, and they went to Beryl's heart like a shock.

She started, and turned her face away, with a blinding rush of tears to her eyes.

"God keep me!" she muttered, brokenly. "Rather—God help me!"

Lorraine heard, but he had loosed her hand and stepped back as he spoke, and the carriage drove on even as Beryl answered him—if answer it could be called, which was only the irrepressible outcry of utter misery.

The man stood still a minute—quite still; then he had mastered himself, and could turn back into the court.

His parting words were ringing in Beryl Carolan's heart, and hers in his.

CHAPTER VII.

JUSTIN HARWOOD.

It was midnight, and beside a blazing fire in a small but richly furnished room in a house in Hanover Street sat a strangely assorted couple.

One of these, who reclined upon a sofa with a handsome

wrap partially covering him, was a man apparently between fifty and sixty. He had the appearance of a gentleman, but his countenance was not prepossessing. It might be partly because he had allowed his hair—once black, now grizzled—to grow so low on his forehead, and his whiskers, beard, and mustache to clothe too thickly the lower part of his face, giving a somewhat uncivilized aspect to features already harsh and rugged; but it was due also to a certain shiftiness in the close-set light eyes—a something in the whole face that seemed to index a life stormy and ill-spent; and what could be seen of the mouth clearly indicated a violent temper.

Opposite to this gentleman, in a low arm-chair, sat Beryl Carolan, her head, with its wealth of red-gold curls, leaning on her hands, which were clasped behind it, her attitude, full of negligent grace, showing the perfect curves of her slight form. She was staring with a listlessness, real or assumed, into the fire, and listening to what the gentleman was saying.

“I don’t see the use of going abroad; we can do much better here—better in one way, after what has happened, than before. Don’t you think so, girl?”

“Yes,” she answered, in that unemotional way in which she had spoken to Lorraine about the charge against her, and which, to a keen physiognomist, meant more than the passion of most women, for her face showed a character in which all the currents ran strong. “Yes, I know what you mean, of course—the old Barcelona life over again, with a variation.”

“And a most profitable life it was,” remarked Justin Harwood; “only—mind, if you play the fool as you did there—”

“Don’t excite yourself,” interrupted Beryl, coolly, without a movement—without a change of color. “I shall do here precisely what I did there, if the occasion arises. Maybe it won’t; they are a wilder lot at Barcelona than in London; but I’ll not take insult from any man living!”

“You draw fine distinctions,” said her uncle, with a savage sneer. “What was your position there?—what will it be here?”

“My position is one thing, my own self-respect another.”

"But the world reckons the last by the first."

"Naturally. And as I have borne much then, I must bear much now. I am an 'an adventuress,' a morally convicted thief, who only escaped legal punishment through the skill of her counsel, and perhaps some aid from her youth and good looks; but you know the length of my tether, and if any man exceeds it through your fault, you know equally what I shall do."

"You speak boldly, girl," said Harwood, roughly.

"Boldly because—safely. You daren't quarrel with me, Justin, so there's no use in blustering."

It seemed strange that she should call her uncle simply by his Christian name; but it was her humor, apparently, to do so, and he had no objection.

"You tempt me sometimes," returned Harwood, raising himself abruptly, "to go straight—"

But there he stopped, for Beryl was laughing, "with a low, shadowy laughter"—not a particle of mirth in it—so bitter, so mocking, that, musical though it was in sound, it was terrible to hear. Harwood stared at her.

"Well?" he said, savagely, at last.

The girl ceased laughing.

"Well," she answered, "you make me laugh; it's not my fault. Now, will you go on with what you were saying at first?"

It was singular to see this stalwart man, who did not look as if there were many things he would shrink from, cowed by this fragile stripling, who set him at naught whenever she chose; perhaps his lameness—his dependence on her—made him afraid to brave her; but cowed, and thoroughly cowed, he certainly was. He muttered an execration, and then threw himself back with a laugh, as if the subject were not worth a struggle.

"Have it your own way," he said. "Only don't cry out before you're bitten."

"I wasn't doing that, Justin. I was only warning you before you let the dog loose. Haven't you done with trying to deceive me? Do you suppose I don't know who it was put up Zorilla to the idea that he could buy me with his diamonds and his palaces and the rest of his paraphernalia?"

"Bah! Was there any need to put him up to it? You have acted foolishly all round. You might have been

Marquesa Zorilla if you'd played your cards properly; and you wouldn't. I did a good thing for you once, and what was my reward?"

"I know what you deserved for that 'good thing,'" returned the girl, with a fierce flash in those violet-blue eyes of hers which gave a glimpse of wilder passion than usually slumbered under the garb of modern civilization. "You deserved what you would have given. You were lucky to escape."

"Charming tigress! However—to business! You've done one good stroke already."

"I don't understand you."

"Capital! I was going to say that you haven't been on the stage for nothing, my dear; but I really think nature has supplied you with all the requisite material."

Beryl was looking at him under veiling lids, with a growing horror in her eyes.

"Do you mean to say that you had no eyes to the future when you instructed your solicitor to go to Vere Lorraine?"

The girl set her teeth like a vise, as if forcing down some passionate outburst. When she spoke it was in the cool, careless manner in which it seemed she frequently addressed her uncle.

"You know perfectly well," she said, "that when I went to Vere Lorraine you had no plans for the future. Only this very night you have decided to remain in England; it was on the cards that we went abroad again; and you know equally well that I never have tried to trap any man to come to your gambling *salon*."

"All right. We won't quarrel on that head. But all the same, it's quite possible he may come. If you ignored a possible future—more fool you; that's all! He's got heaps of money, and may as well spend it here as anywhere else."

Beryl did not answer; she sat staring blankly into the fire. Her heart was beating in slow, heavy throbs. Was there any truth in Justin Harwood's words? any possibility that Vere Lorraine would not let the woman whose cause he had pleaded drop out of his life? Beryl Carolan knew her power; how could she fail to know it? Could she feel sure that it had not—though by no act or will of her own—influenced Lorraine? She said to herself:

"Maybe for the time, as a man is captivated by beauty;

but he is a busy man; his life is filled by many things; he likes, perhaps—is growing to love, Enid Roden; he will forget me—as he should; he will not come here!”

Yet there was no wish, no hope to see him again, side by side with the wish, the hope that they had parted forever when Vere Lorraine, holding her hand in his, had said, “Heaven keep you!”

“There’s no doubt of success,” Harwood went on. “It’s a safer game here than in Paris, where they can jump on you; but in this country you can do pretty well what you like. Call a thing a club, and you can make it a gaming and drinking-saloon rolled into one if you choose. It’s a man’s own fault if he can’t make a living in London.”

“Unless he have a conscience,” said Beryl, “and then he may chance to starve!”

“And isn’t it his fault if he have a conscience? Bah! there are thousands worse than I am, who sneak about, and go to church, and do the respectable all round, and their business life is one swindle.”

“The worse for them and none the better for you, Justin.”

“Bah! if we’re no worse than the rest of the world, there’s nothing much adrift. We shall make a good start at next Thursday’s ‘at home;’ the men will come, not the women. By the way, do you know anything of that fellow Gresham, who came last week?”

“Only that he seems to be well off, and is separated from his wife.”

“Who is his wife?”

“Emilie Leicester—a cousin of Lorraine. The Rodens know her.”

“H’m! Gresham goes in for high play, and can drink a few good glasses of wine, eh?”

“He won’t do the last in my presence, Justin.”

“No need, my girl, no need,” returned Harwood, hastily, dreading a contest in which he knew he must be worsted. “He can’t know the rigs, and he doesn’t look as if he’d twig too much.”

“I’m going to my room,” said Beryl, rising suddenly, “it’s near one, and there’s nothing more to talk about. Good-night.”

The girl went slowly from the room, up the stairs, to

her own. The lamps on the table were burning low; she did not turn them out; she stopped, leaning against the door which she had closed behind her, and gazed before her with a stony despair in her young face far more terrible than any passionate grief.

"I wonder," she said in a half-dreamy tone, "whether it would be so great a sin to end it all? What is my life—what can it ever be? But the priests tell us that suicide cuts off forgiveness—and I have so much need of forgiveness. Cruel as the grave? It is life that is cruel, not death!"

CHAPTER VIII.

EMILIE GRESHAM.

THE many tongues of the hydra-headed press were loosed concerning the case of Beryl Carolan, and they spoke, one and all.

Various were the comments; all pitied the beautiful girl so abruptly hurled down from her high estate. Some considered that Mr. Roden would have acted more generously in not prosecuting; others warned society against its too ready welcome to strangers; but all agreed on one point—that the verdict was practically *not proven*; that Beryl Carolan escaped, not because the evidence cleared her, but because it was not sufficient to condemn her. Socially, the effect was the same; the places that knew Beryl Carolan could know her no more; she must take rank as a lovely and more than usually clever adventuress; and of course the gossip of club and tea-table was quick to endow that word "adventuress" with its fullest, most sinister, meaning. People will forgive anything sooner than being duped, and Beryl Carolan had committed an unpardonable sin—she had duped society.

A lady, sitting alone in her drawing-room in the evening, read the "Times" leader on the famous trial for the second time that day, and laid the paper down, when she had finished, with a sigh.

The room was small, the house was in Norfolk Street, Park Lane; but it was furnished with a taste which does not always go hand in hand with the means which enable its full development. Tints were well chosen and well grouped, and there was none of the crowding so common

in ladies' drawing-rooms, disagreeable to the eye, distracting to male visitors, who are always colliding with spider-legged tables and gingerbread chairs, and disastrous to the bric-à-brac with which the said tables are always loaded.

The lady was still young, perhaps thirty, perhaps a few years more; but hers was a sorrowful as well as a pretty face. The features might not bear artistic criticism, but the eyes were singularly sweet in expression; there was a soft rose flush on the cheeks, and the general effect was something better than prettiness. In form she was *petite* and slight. She looked the kind of woman a man should cherish and protect; not foolish or helpless, but yet happiest when protected, and at her best under the conditions for which nature and training fitted her.

"I wonder if Vere will come in this evening," she said to herself, glancing at the clock. "I have not liked to ask him; but I fancy he will come if he can. Is that a handsome outside?"

She started, and listening, with a bright sparkle in her eyes, and a second later the door-bell rang; then a pause, and then a light tap at the drawing-room door.

"Come in!" she cried, and in came the tall form of Vere Lorraine. "How good of you!" she cried, springing to meet him with outstretched hands. "I was so longing for you to come."

"Were you, dear?" said he, tenderly, and stooping he kissed her on the cheek; "then I am doubly glad I came." He led her back to her seat on the couch by the fire, and sat down by her side. "And why," he added; "did you want so specially to see me this evening?"

"You must know, Vere," returned his cousin, "I wish I had had the courage to be in court; but I didn't feel that I could bear to see that poor girl in the dock; and then I so dread a crowd. But I am so glad she is acquitted, and I liked your speech so much, Vere."

"Thanks, Emmie, for the last. But why are you so glad that Beryl Carolan is acquitted?"

Emilie Gresham looked at her cousin in a puzzled manner; but she could make nothing of his face—no one could if he meant to conceal his thoughts.

"What an odd question," she said; "of course I should be glad. No one wants, surely, to see a gently bred woman sent to prison."

"I see. Now I have my answer."

"What do you mean, Vere?"

"I wanted to discover if you had any doubt of her guilt."

He gave her no "lead" in his manner of saying these words. Mrs. Gresham looked toward the fire and shook her head.

"Why," she said, "she is certainly guilty. Don't you think so, Vere?"

"No."

Emilie turned round quickly.

"No!" she repeated, wonderingly. "Do you mean that—" She paused.

"I mean that Beryl Carolan did not steal those diamonds."

Emilie Gresham had such blind belief in her cousin as to endow him with almost supernatural powers, and if Lorraine had told her two and two made six she would have begun to question the facts of arithmetic. It was quite in the order of things, therefore, for her to accept his last words as an *ipse dixit*, and so she said:

"Who did, then? Didn't Miss Carolan know anything about the matter?"

"I don't say that; and I am only giving you my own opinion. The presumption is against Miss Carolan."

"But you are sure to be right, Vere."

He smiled.

"If I accepted your opinion of me, Emmie, I should be vain enough for anything; fortunately, I have sufficient modesty to discount it. I might be wrong; but my own mind is perfectly clear on the point. The girl is shielding some one else's guilt, not hiding her own."

Emilie sat silent and pensive for a minute.

"She never told you anything, then?" she said, at length.

"You silly little woman! if she had, should I be speaking as I am speaking now—should I so betray trust?"

"Of course not, Vere. I wasn't thinking."

"No," Lorraine went on; "she kept her own counsel to me as to the world. I am judging by my own observation—founding my opinion, in part, upon things, many of which could not well be defined; others I prefer not to define. But I repeat that the girl is not guilty of that crime. Nothing short of her own confession—and not

even that if I saw a motive for self-accusation—would convince me that she was.”

“You speak strongly, Vere; and you would not allow yourself to be influenced by Miss Carolan’s beauty?”

“Scarcely; not where it was a question of guilt or innocence. I was junior, when I was first at the bar, in a case that made a great stir at the time. The accused was a woman, the charge one of murder; she was said to have poisoned her husband. She was young, very lovely, with the face of an *ingénue*—sweet, frank, and innocent, looking you full in the face with those cloudless china-blue eyes. We were retained for the defense, and my leader was perfectly convinced of the woman’s innocence, but I said all along I believed her guilty. The evidence was defective, and if it had been twice as strong the jury would have acquitted our client. She was acquitted amid a storm of excitement; the judge almost wept, handkerchiefs were to the fore in the jury-box and all over the court. Nevertheless, two years later, the lovely widow, being taken up for another crime, I forget what, serenely confessed to the poisoning.”

“Horrible wretch!” said Emilie, shuddering; “but then, Vere, what made you think her guilty if the evidence was defective?”

“Just things of the kind which now make me believe Beryl Carolan innocent—partly points of evidence which, though legally insufficient, were, to my mind, morally convincing; partly things about the woman herself. As a judge, I should have acquitted her; but I should know I was acquitting a guilty woman.”

“That’s a sort of thing I can’t understand, you know,” said Mrs. Gresham.

“Because, woman-like, dear, you want to put feeling and impressions in the place of law. I am afraid a good many innocent prisoners would be condemned if that were the rule. There’s already too much of it with juries.”

“Well, women generally get the benefit of it,” said Emilie; “so they have no cause to complain. But you would have gained Miss Carolan’s case anyhow, Vere. *You* would persuade a jury to anything.”

“Emmie,” said her cousin, “whenever I feel inclined for a very strong whiff of incense I have only to come to you.”

"But what I said is true, isn't it?" cried Mrs. Gresham.

"Partly—not entirely."

"Oh, nonsense! Everybody says—"

"Never mind what everybody says, coz; I came to see you, and talk to you about this trial in which you are so much interested, not to listen to glorifications of myself."

"Then I'll spare you, but keep my opinion all the same," returned Emilie. "And now I am going to ask you a lot of questions."

And she was as good as her word. How did Beryl Carolan bear herself?—how did she look? What did she wear? would have followed, only that the "descriptive reporter" had already supplied information on that point. How did Enid give evidence? was she nervous under cross-examination? etc., etc.; all of which questions Lorraine answered satisfactorily.

Then said Emilie, thoughtfully:

"It is a very strange case—very strange! I wonder if the truth will ever be discovered?"

"Heaven knows!"

"Perhaps," Mrs. Gresham continued, "Miss Carolan will go abroad—what can she do in this country?—and you and she will never meet again."

"Likely enough," he answered, with just the right shade of indifference in his tone and manner, but an undefined feeling in his heart that the likelihood was the other way—that he would make it so.

"If you *did* meet," added Emilie, "you might be falling in love, and that wouldn't do, would it?"

"I am afraid I am hardly the man to think about what 'would do,' Emmie, if I fell in love, and I am quite ready to allow that Beryl Carolan is 'dangerous!'"

"Very—I should say," replied Emilie, emphatically. "But you mustn't fall in love with her, Vere. There are so many nice girls—but I don't think I know of any good enough for you—unless—it were Enid Roden—no, she isn't, but she's the nearest."

"Enid Roden!" repeated Lorraine, and then he laughed.

"Are you 'speiring,' Emmie, dear?"

"No—I know it would be useless with you. But she is a very sweet girl, isn't she?"

"Very sweet."

"And May?"

"May has more character. By the way, Roden has given Hazlemere the commission to paint May's portrait, despite my having appeared for the defense to-day."

"I am so glad."

She saw that Lorraine did not care to discuss Enid Roden, and so did not return to the subject.

Was Lorraine growing to like Enid?

"When does Hazlemere commence work?" added Emilie.

"In another month or so, I believe."

"Yes."

Mrs. Gresham spoke a little absently. Her eyes wandered to the fire. Lorraine watched her keenly, but in silence. Suddenly she said, without looking round:

"Vere, have you seen him lately—Herbert?"

He knew quite well where her thoughts had strayed. Cruel as her husband had been to her, she loved him still, with the tenacious affection of a woman, and in her heart forgave him.

"I saw him a few days ago," said Lorraine, gently, "in Piccadilly, and Hazlemere supped with him and others a few nights ago."

"And you thought him—not changed?" was Emilie's next question.

"Not changed, dear. I wish I could give you better comfort; but I can not be untrue to you."

"No—no!" said Emilie, clasping her hands, "I would not have you otherwise. Your loyalty is an inexpressible comfort to me. I always know that I can trust you perfectly."

Lorraine took one of the trembling hands in his, and that strong, sympathetic clasp strengthened the woman's spirit, as wine strengthens the weak body. She looked up to him with dim, grateful eyes.

"Ah, Vere," she said, softly, "how few there are like you—and, oh! so many like *him*! I sometimes think that if I had been more forbearing—"

"Nay, Emmie, dear," her cousin said, very earnestly and gently, but firmly; "you must not reproach yourself. Heaven knows you bore enough—too much. There is a point where the endurance of wrongs becomes a sin; you almost reached that point—forgive me, dear; you were too true a woman to quite reach it."

"I know you are right, Vere. Yet if now—after three years—I held out the olive-branch—"

"Your husband would accept it, Emmie, with contempt in his heart for you, and would treat you as a slave. The olive-branch must come from him. He has wronged you too deeply for you to make overtures of peace—unless he returns to you of his own will, seeking forgiveness, because he knows he has sore need of it—it will be all in vain."

She sighed heavily.

"You are right," she said again; "and you know that I would never act in this matter without your advice. I am not a strong, self-reliant woman. I only hope my dependence on you is not a burden to you."

"A burden, Emmie? It is a very precious and sacred charge. Were we not good friends even in the days when I was a youth at college and you a little girl, and I tried to teach you to row—and, I am bound to say, didn't succeed?"

"Oh, I was always so stupid at things of that sort!" exclaimed Emilie, half laughing and half crying; "but I learned chess better, didn't I? Ah! those were happy days, Vere."

"The sunshine has not all faded, Emmie, has it?" he said in a brighter tone. "Heaven grant there may yet be sunny days in store for you!"

"It seems folly to hope, Vere," said his cousin; "and yet I can't quite help hoping. And you?"

"I?" he answered, rising, and he smiled. "Do you fancy I am unhappy, Emmie?"

"N-no—not that; but you might be happier."

"Most of us 'might be happier,'" replied Lorraine. "The world has treated me well; I have hosts of friends—dearest of all, my little cousin. What more can I need?"

"Something still, Vere," she said; "you know that, don't you?"

"I know what you mean, Emmie."

"Ah! you evade me. Well, never mind. Some day—"

"You will laugh at me, or be sorry for me. Which?"

"Never the first, Vere. I don't think the last—I hope not."

"And I also; but *quien sabe*? No man can be trusted in the affairs of love."

He spoke jestingly, and Emilie Gresham, as she bid him adieu, certainly never supposed that she would have any reason to remember either her words or his—any reason to grieve that Vere Lorraine loved “not wisely, but too well.”

CHAPTER IX.

AT HARWOOD'S.

THERE was something of an Oriental tone about this drawing-room, more quickly felt than easy to define. It might be the profusion of flowers, the rich, yet subdued tints of the draperies, the soft, rosy glow of light shed, not from gas-burners, but from graceful hanging-lamps and wax-lights—the faint perfume that filled the air; it was all these things, perhaps, and more besides. A delicious room to sit and dream in, or lounge in one of those luxurious fauteuils, listening to music. It seemed to be out of harmony with anything commonplace; one needed a touch of poetry in the people and the talk.

Yet beyond the arch draped by sweeping amber curtains, looped back by golden cords and tassels, was a scene scarcely poetic, and on the surface commonplace.

For card-tables were set out, and about a dozen men were playing cards, though none of them was too intent on the game to abstract all attention from the one woman who, not playing herself, moved in and out among the players.

A girl with short curls of reddish-gold hair, and deep violet eyes, and a complexion strangely pale, yet so wonderfully clear and soft that its very pallor seemed, somehow, an added beauty.

The girl's dress was one of those combinations of pale green and amber, which, both for color and the exquisite flow of artistic folds—it seemed to be made of silk that can be drawn through a wedding-ring—one seldom sees out of a picture. A living picture, this woman; no wonder that even gamblers could hardly keep any wits for the cards when she was present.

“Your play, Mr. Standish,” she said, pausing carelessly by the chair of a young man who was playing *vingt-et-un* with three others, among them Justin Harwood, who half reclined on a couch; “you don't look at your cards.”

“How can I?” said he, glancing upward significantly. Beryl Carolan laughed.

"Then I will go into the drawing-room," she said.

"If you do, Miss Carolan, you will break up the game," said Rowcliffe, who was one of the players.

Harwood was banker.

"All the better for you," she returned, coolly, "for you have been losing."

She turned to a neighboring table, where sat Herbert Gresham and a young nobleman—Lord Charles Welby—playing *écarté*.

"Who is winning?" she asked, seating herself. "Welby, I see."

"Take my cards," said Gresham, "and play for me, and the luck will turn."

"Oh, I should throw up my cards against such an opponent!" cried young Welby.

"Make yourself easy," said Beryl, coolly; "I am not going to play. I detest cards; I can not understand the pleasure of gambling."

"It is the hope, the uncertainty," said Gresham; "the same excitement one has in speculating."

"I am not speculative, and I assure you that card-playing bores me to extinction."

"You never play? Yet you know all the games?" said Lord Charles.

"Surely—a good deal many more than you know, maybe; but perhaps for that very reason I hate cards."

"But they are so exciting," said Gresham.

Beryl laughed.

"You find them so; I could not get excited—only bored."

"Even if you are winning?"

"That makes no difference. Now, your play. Losing again? Oh! I have made you talk and spoiled your play. I am going away."

"No, no!" cried Gresham, eagerly. "I would a million times rather lose the game than your company!"

"No doubt. But I will return by and by, and see how much more you have lost."

At that moment a man who had just risen from a table near—a good-looking fellow of perhaps thirty, a well-known *littérateur*—came up to Beryl.

"Miss Carolan," he said, entreatingly, "won't you favor us with a song?"

"Have you been losing, then, at cards," said the girl, archly, "that you fall back on music?"

"No; but I greatly prefer the music—especially when you are the singer," was the reply.

"After that pretty speech," said Beryl, rising, "I suppose I must comply with your request. What shall I sing?"

"Anything," as she placed her hand on the speaker's arm; "it is sure to be charming."

"Of course. Well, I must make my own choice, I suppose."

Justin Harwood looked after his niece's retreating figure, and his brow contracted slightly, for there was an indefinite restless movement among the men which indicated a disposition to follow where Beryl led. Mr. Harwood did not want to have his guests drawn away from the tables.

Meanwhile, Beryl's companion had opened the beautiful grand piano which stood in the adjoining room, and Beryl was bending over a portfolio wherein were songs in half a dozen different languages.

"Here is one," she said at last, "that I think you will like. It is a Bohemian melody, very quaint, and in such odd rhythm. The words were in the Czech, but I made a rendering of them—don't criticise that, please."

"I am sure it will be good. But do you understand the Czech?"

"I have something more than a smattering of it. I was in Prague three months, you know, and I am very quick at languages."

"I think you have been everywhere!"

"To most places in Europe, and a good many outside of it, Mr. Malleson."

She sat down to the piano, and began a quaint, wild symphony, and a moment later her rich, full, strangely pathetic voice filled the room, and brought most of the men flocking in from the card-room, those who remained behind dropping their cards or playing wildly.

These were the words, every word crisply enunciated:

"Oh, moaning wind! Oh, rolling sea!

Oh, heart that is grieving!

Oh, hands that are weaving

One sark for my love and me!

Where the waves sob and weep,

Softly we two will sleep.

Hush! Stay, spinning! He speaks! I hear!
He calls to me. 'Yes, I am coming, dear.'
Long years he is dead; I am old and gray.
No, no; he died only yesterday!
Almost my weary task is o'er;
Weep for us both, oh, wind! oh, sea!
The shroud's nearly finished for him and me;
To-morrow, dear love, I shall spin no more."

Beryl threw an intensity of passionate feeling into the words and song which was a revelation to two or three of her listeners, who, never having heard her sing before, and being but superficial observers, judged her by the *esprit moquant* which they took to express her real nature. Beryl, in truth, had forgotten her audience, as a genuine artist should do, and her emotions had the fuller play because they were habitually veiled. The surroundings, the room, the men about her, came back to her with a kind of shock when she dropped her hands from the keys.

The murmur of admiration and delight—far more eloquent tribute than the usual "Oh, *thanks!*" etc.—gave her no pleasure. It was no happiness to her to please these men; but when, one and all, they urged her to sing again, she complied, choosing one of Schubert's ballads; and then again she was begged to sing, and gave them, "Oh, That We Two Were Maying!" But after that she rose.

"I have sung enough for the present," she said. "None of you want to lie under the church-yard sod just yet, do you? *Vive la bagatelle!*"

She turned away and dropped into a fauteuil near one of the windows. Some of the men lingered near her, others returned to the card-room. Beryl glanced up at Rowcliffe, who was one of the former.

"I wonder if Mr. Hazlemere is coming this evening?" she said. "Have you seen him lately?"

"I met him yesterday evening in Piccadilly, with Vere Lorraine. They were going to St. James's Hall."

Vere Lorraine! It was six weeks ago Beryl had seen him last, and now the mere name seemed to stop the beating of her heart. But there was no change of color, not the quiver of an eyelid. She had her nerves under perfect control.

"They were going to the popular concert, I suppose?" she observed at once. "They were doing Beethoven's

septet, I know; and Lorraine is a devotee of music, isn't he?"

"Mad about it," replied Rowcliffe, laughing. "Hazlemere spoke of coming in this evening."

A vague something—was it hope, was it dread, or both?—stirred in the woman's heart. Vere Lorraine here! She shrunk from the very thought. What could he deem her to be? He must already believe her a thief; and does not all experience prove that a woman who commits crime is rarely of otherwise blameless life? And to see her amid these surroundings! He had heard of the *salon*, true; every one was talking of Harwood's "evenings;" but "things seen are mightier than things heard."

Yet, if he came, would it be for the sake of play? Surely not. Vere Lorraine was no gambler. Would it be—Nay, hope was selfish; she must crush it.

There was scarcely a pause before Beryl said, carelessly:

"I dare say he will turn up. Have you seen his new picture—a view on the Arno? It is a gem. I know the place so well."

"I am a poor judge of pictures. No, I haven't seen the work."

"If you don't care for pictures, you have lost nothing. A hansom has just stopped. Perhaps that is Mr. Hazlemere."

"You are very anxious for him to come," said Rowcliffe, lightly, but with a touch of jealousy in his tone.

"I like people who can talk sense," returned Beryl, coolly.

"Which means that I can not?"

"No—you can, but you seldom do; so you are a sinner where others are only fools."

"I must set about mending my ways," said Rowcliffe in a low tone—he had seated himself by her side—"and then, perhaps, I shall earn forgiveness."

"I have nothing to forgive you for; I accept nonsense as a matter of course."

"And it makes no difference to you, then, how I talk?" said Rowcliffe, gnawing his lip.

"Yes—perhaps; don't get angry; *that* won't have the least effect—a new-comer, you will have to excuse me."

She turned toward the door as the servant flung it open.

"Mr. Lorraine—Mr. Hazlemere!"

Beryl rose slowly, and for just a moment she paused, so that Hazlemere was half across the room before she advanced to meet him. What she experienced in that moment—what wonder—what delight—what agony of pain and humiliation, no one could have dreamed who saw her face, colorless now, as always—her eyes smiling a welcome, while her teeth were close set—then the lips, too, smiled, and the outstretched hand—the low, sweet voice, seconded face and hand.

“Ah! Mr. Hazlemere, I am so glad to see you. Mr. Lorraine!”

She gave her hand to the painter; then transferred it to his friend.

“I have used my *carte blanche*, you see, Miss Carolan,” said Hazlemere.

“I am very pleased,” she said, “to meet Mr. Lorraine again.”

So, still with a smile, she was easy, graceful, mistress of herself; but her eyes had not met Lorraine’s—he felt just a quiver pass through her hand as his closed over it. He could not know, could not dream, all that was in her heart; but this at least, he could read—“You here—who know me for a thief—who must believe me to be even worse”—and his own heart rebelled against that thought in hers which made her gaze shun his and her hand tremble in his clasp.

“Thank you,” he said, answering Beryl’s words, “for your kind welcome.”

He spoke as if he meant it, and Beryl, somehow, felt that he did; yet did he not know that this was Liberty Hall, where any man—well-bred and moving in good circles—was welcome, if he would risk his money at play?

“Let me introduce you to my uncle,” she added. “He is in the next room.”

What would Lorraine think of Justin Harwood? That was the question Beryl was asking herself as she crossed the drawing-room, leaning on Vere’s arm.

Harwood, deserted for a time, was still reclining on the couch near one of the card-tables. He looked up as he saw his niece and the guest approaching, and Beryl shot a keen, covert glance in the latter’s face.

“Uncle Justin,” she said, “this is Mr. Lorraine.”

Harwood raised himself, and held out his hand.

"Very pleased to see you," he said, with that kind of abruptness which is not underbred, but yet lacks all suavity—a manner not unfrequently found among gentlemen who have associated much with inferiors.

Lorraine shook hands; but he could not, in sincerity, have returned his host's compliment. His impression of Mr. Justin Harwood was by no means favorable.

"I wouldn't trust you, my friend, further than I could see you," was the keen-sighted advocate's inward comment; "and the seamy side of life has been uppermost with you. Heaven help Beryl Carolan!"

The men came flocking back into the card-room again, some, who knew Lorraine, greeting him; others were introduced to him; professed gamblers were some of these, and Beryl Carolan the only woman present. Thorough scoundrel, whatever his looks, must be the man who placed her, with her dazzling beauty, too, amid such surroundings; yet, if she were no stranger to a scene like this—if it were not the first time she had been the presiding genius of a thinly veiled gambling *salon*—she held her own with a dignity the more perfect, the more beautiful, in that it was not overt. She laughed, jested, kept no one at a distance, and yet perhaps the boldest there would not have ventured a look or word that could give offense. Did Vere Lorraine judge Beryl as she feared? No.

"Do you play cards, Mr. Lorraine?" asked Harwood.

"Sometimes," he answered. "I'll try issues with you at *écarté*, if you will allow me."

"With pleasure."

Lorraine seated himself. Beryl, moving round the table, paused behind her uncle's couch, and laid her hand a moment lightly on his shoulder; then she turned away, speaking to Hazlemere and some others.

Lorraine, playing his own game, and as Harwood quickly saw, thoroughly *au fait*, had eyes and senses for everything else around him. The stakes, he noticed, were mostly high, and ran up to figures only permitted in regular gambling clubs. Here there seemed no limit, unless Beryl Carolan chose to put one, which once or twice she did. In one case it was a young officer who was playing three-handed euchre with Herbert Gresham and Standish, and who, having already lost nearly one hundred pounds,

wanted to double the stakes. His face was flushed and excited, his hands trembled.

"Nonsense!" Beryl said, coolly, "the stakes have run too high already, Mr. Gresham; not a cent above twenty pounds."

"It wasn't my doing," exclaimed Gresham, eagerly, "on my honor—"

"It was every one's doing," interrupted Beryl. "Twenty pounds, Mr. Vining," turning to the young officer, "and I wish good luck to your cards."

"Then my fortunes will surely turn," said he, with a flush of pleasure in his eyes; but Gresham's brow contracted slightly. Beryl lingered near the table, watching the progress of the game, and certainly Vining's luck turned; he won the next trick and swept up all the stakes.

"Ah! Miss Carolan!" said Gresham, bending toward her, "wish me luck next time!"

"No," she retorted, carelessly, "you have had your share of luck this evening."

Miss Carolan moved away into the drawing-room and there she threw herself down on a lounge in a shaded corner, glad to be, though only for a few moments, out of the hateful glare, the hateful atmosphere. She knew her peace would be short-lived; yet it was a breathing space. She was so heart-sick, so brain-weary; she who ruled here a queen, a most miserable queen indeed, who would have yielded her crown with ineffable joy, only to win peace, to gain one month of real happiness.

So soon? Was some one already coming to disturb her? She turned her head, and her heart began beating in quick, wild throbs; it was the tall figure of Vere Lorraine she saw advancing toward her. As he came near, she raised her eyes fleetingly to his face, and perhaps he read in them that he was not unwelcome. He paused, bending down.

"May I?" he said, smiling, "or do you wish to be alone?"

"No," she said; "are you weary, then, already of the cards?"

"Cards have no attraction for me," returned Lorraine, taking the vacant place beside her; "and if they had—"

"If they had," interposed Beryl, "you would prefer my

society—that is the only thing you *could* say under the circumstances, isn't it?"

"And your interpretation of my words the only one, Miss Carolan?"

"How do you mean?" she asked, a little puzzled.

"That you credit me with mere idle compliment."

"I understand. I must not play a game of foils with you. I might have known that." She hesitated a moment; then added in a lower tone: "Will you forgive me?"

"When I discover the offense."

"You are not offended, then? That is generous; but I am offended with myself. I ought to spare *you* my bitter mood. I owe you so much."

"You will offend, or, rather, wound me, if you say that," said Lorraine, earnestly.

"Yes; but let me have the luxury of gratitude—it is so rarely that I have had cause for it; but I will try to keep it to myself henceforth. Now tell me, have you seen Enid Roden lately?"

"I saw her last week. She told me then—"

He paused.

"Go on," Beryl said, quietly. "She told you—"

"That she had twice written to you, Miss Carolan, and you had not replied. She seemed deeply grieved."

"And you tell me this—why?" said Beryl.

"Because it would make Enid happier if you wrote to her, even if she may not see you."

"Make her happier!" repeated Beryl, slowly, with a glance toward the other room that lent the bitterest significance to her words. "You are a man of the world, and you know that friendship between Enid Roden and me is impossible now. Would it be even honest in me to write to her—a strange argument, perhaps, from my lips—"

Lorraine interrupted her, bending forward, speaking almost sternly:

"In my turn," he said, "let me ask a question: 'A strange argument'—why?"

"*You* ask that?" said the girl, flushing suddenly.

"Yes," said Lorraine in the same manner, "*I* ask it; will you answer it?"

"You know the answer."

"Miss Carolan, this is the second time you have read my mind—and a second time you have read it wrongly."

"What do you mean?" said the girl, under her breath. Her heart seemed to be beating in her throat.

"Answer my question, please."

It was almost like a command. Beryl's bosom heaved; she turned her face aside.

"You know," she said, her voice sinking to a whisper, "that I am guilty!"

She started and caught her breath as Lorraine's hand was laid abruptly on hers.

"I know," he said, "that you are *not* guilty!"

A minute's dead silence; the flush had died from Beryl's face now; all the blood in her body seemed to have gone to her heart. She did not move—she hardly breathed; every power of her being was gathered into one focus—she was deaf, blind, stunned. He believed her innocent. Vere Lorraine knew she was not guilty.

At last, slowly, a pause between each word, she spoke:

"You—can not—know—me—guiltless. I have—not—denied."

"Nor have you confessed. You need have no fear; I know nothing, in the sense of knowledge founded upon facts; but remember that my training, and my nature also, have taught me to look at many things beside direct evidence; to judge people from various standpoints."

"No one else thinks as you do, Mr. Lorraine."

"The opinion of the whole world could not shake mine, once formed. For my own sake, however little you may value my belief, I want you to know this, that I hold you guiltless of actual crime."

"Guiltless of actual crime!" The words did not seem her own; they dropped slowly from her bloodless lips; then a pause, and then, not turning or looking toward him, the girl stretched out her hand to him. "Mr. Lorraine," she said, "thank you!"

Closely, very closely, Lorraine clasped the girl's hand in his, and suddenly bending his head, pressed his lips upon it.

Was that kiss only an earnest of faith and friendship, of the blessed truth that one man at least believed in the woman the whole world condemned? Was it not more also? Did not Vere Lorraine feel some deep and subtle sympathy? Had she not drawn him here to-night? Had not the desire to see her again grown with every day that lengthened the distance of time between them; strength-

ened with every effort of the iron will to master it, till he obeyed it as a blind man obeys his guide—and came? He had courted fate, and fate is no fickle mistress. If not the rose, yet near the rose; if not passion that throbbed in Vere Lorriane's pulses now, yet perilously near it—for him, and, perchance, for her.

He did not remain much longer to-night; several of the men came in from the card-room, and he and Beryl were no longer alone; but when he was taking leave, he said to her in a low tone:

“I hope you will let me come again soon?”

“We shall be always pleased to see you, Mr. Lorraine.”

It was said almost coldly; but perhaps he divined the girl's motive; anyhow, he only said in his heart:

“I will come soon; I *must* come soon!”

Alone in her chamber, half kneeling, half crouching on the floor, Beryl was whispering that night with white lips, her hands pressed tightly over her heart:

“He does not believe me guilty. All the earth, the sky, the whole universe, is ringing with the glad tidings. And he comes here for my sake. Oh, if I could have said to him to-night, ‘Come no more—for your own peace, come no more!’ But how was that possible? Ah!”—now her face was bowed down in her hands—“why does that kiss burn into my heart—burn like living fire? Does he—no, no; I am mad! Oh, Mary, mother, have pity on him! Save him from the misery of loving me!”

CHAPTER X.

THE NEW PRIEST.—THE FIRST SITTING.

EMILIE GRESHAM's brougham stopped in front of the Rodens' house in Kensington Gore, and its pretty owner alighted and ran up to the door. A minute later she was in the drawing-room, and in May Roden's embrace.

“You dear, good, punctual creature!” cried the latter. “It is so kind of you to come with me!”

“Not at all; it's a great pleasure. And, mind, I sha'n't go to sleep and leave you free to flirt with Mr. Hazlemere.”

“I have no such intention, ma'am—though he's very good-looking and nice, isn't he?”

"*Very* nice; he must be, since he's such a friend of Vere's," said Emilie.

"You adore Mr. Lorraine, Emmie?"

"I think I do; he's worth it. Now, let me look at you. Yes, charming!" twisting the girl round and regarding her with head on one side. "Hazlemere ought to like that gown. Did he tell you what he wanted?"

"He told me to wear amber, with a terra-cotta red sash draped across it, and so I have obeyed him."

"Quite right. Come on, or we shall be late. I am going to ask you a favor on the way."

"It is granted, Emmie."

"Don't say that yet."

The two ladies descended to the carriage. Mrs. Gresham gave the order, and they drove off.

"And now for your favor?" said May.

"Well, it's this, May. You know that for some time I have been helping St. Eanswythe's Mission, in the East End—Paradise Lane—"

"Like the good little soul you are! Yes?"

"Don't say that. There's a new priest now, you know?"

"Is there? Since how long? Is Mr. Dempster dead?"

"No; the work knocked him up. He was never strong. He had to take a country curacy. Our new priest came a fortnight ago, and he is just the man for the work—about forty-five, I suppose, and wonderfully energetic. *Such* a nice man! It is astonishing the way he has made with the people already."

"What is his name?" asked May.

"Harrington—Bernard Harrington. He has been a great deal in Australia, so he is just fitted for the many-sided life of the East End. He talks like an 'old shell-back,' as he calls it, to the sailors. He is a man of the world, and yet as ascetic as a monk, and never seems to think of himself at all. He is a doctor, too!"

"A doctor?" cried May.

"Yes; he studied, and actually practiced as a surgeon, and then he entered the priesthood, and went out to Australia to a mission station."

"He had what you call a 'vocation,' " said May.

Emilie nodded.

"Yes," she said. "Now we want to give a series of

entertainments to the poor people. Mr. Dempster hardly did enough in that way. Will you help us at one or two of them with some songs? It would be a real favor; for of course all such help must come from the West End, and sometimes it is so difficult to get."

"Of course I'll help you with all my heart, Emmie, and be delighted. Perhaps Enid would come too?"

"Oh! May, thanks so much; but Enid? She is not very strong, and your mother might fancy it was not safe for her to go to the East End; you know the notions some West End people have that typhus and small-pox are always walking about in those parts."

May laughed.

"Well," she said, "I'll feel my ground; but they wouldn't mind my going; and as for the church, papa will grumble and talk about Emilie Gresham's ritualistic proclivities, but he doesn't know anything about it, and I can always get my own way with him."

"Then we can meet in a day or two," said Emilie, "and arrange about dates, and so forth."

"I wish," May added, a sorrowful shade falling on her bright face, "Beryl Carolan had been available; I am sure she would have helped you, and she sings divinely; she was professionally trained."

"She would indeed have been an acquisition," replied Mrs. Gresham; "but, of course, that is impossible now, and I don't even know her."

"And if you did she would not go," said May; "she is very proud. Enid has twice written to her, and she has not even replied."

"But, my dear May, Enid could not be friends with her now. The *ménage* in Hanover Street is a very queer one; all sorts of things are said of Beryl Carolan."

"So I have heard; but Enid won't believe anything against Beryl."

"Dear loyal Enid! She knows so little of the world; I am not very wise, still, Enid must know that she and Miss Carolan are now on different planes."

"I don't think she wanted to see Beryl, only to hear from her. Papa, of course, would be terribly angry if he knew she had written; he is so bitter against Beryl."

Emilie leaned back in silence for a minute or two; then she said, rather abruptly:

"When did you last see Vere?"

"A fortnight ago—on Sunday—he dined with us. Why?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Which always means something, Emmie—what is it?"

"You can guess, can't you, May?" said Mrs. Gresham, bending forward.

"Yes," replied the girl, slowly—"about Enid, you mean?"

Emilie nodded.

"Do you think she is getting to care for him, May?"

"I am afraid so, but I don't believe it's any use. He would come more often if he liked her—in that way, I mean—and he treats her just as he does me."

Emilie recalled what Lorraine had said of Enid.

"How perverse men and women are!" she said. "As for Vere, I have often wondered if he was in love with some one years ago, and hasn't got over it. You'd never find out; he's as secret as the grave."

The stopping of the carriage before the house where Hazlemere lodged, in Melbury Road, prevented a rejoinder from May. The two ladies alighted, and were shown up to Hazlemere's studio.

The artist, attired in the professional velveteen coat, received them in his usual warm, frank manner. Emilie, of course, he already knew intimately, and he felt pretty well at home with May. He was not much troubled with shyness or conventionality, and Mary Roden was the kind of girl with whom friendly relations are quickly established.

"Ah!" Hazlemere said, when she had removed her mantle, "that is just right—a lovely color. Would you allow me—or perhaps Mrs. Gresham can do what I want."

"What is that?" asked Emilie, turning round from a half-finished landscape which she had been contemplating.

"The sash," said Hazlemere; "it is tied a little too high."

Emilie unfastened it and tied it lower.

"How is that?" she asked.

"That will do—thanks. Quite loose, please. Now, Miss Roden, shall we start?"

May was posed, Emilie seated herself, and Hazlemere addressed May.

"I don't want you to look fixed, you know," he said.

"I would much rather you talked. Besides, this morning I shall not be able to do more than get over preliminaries."

"I'm so glad I may talk," said May, "for I am rather a chatter-box."

Hazlemere laughed.

"That is no fault, I fancy," said he.

"A word for yourself, Mr. Hazlemere," exclaimed Emilie, "since you are rather a chatter-box."

"Now, I call that cruel," said he, sketching away vigorously. "But why don't you stop me if I talk too much?"

"Because I like to hear you talk, and have a fellow-feeling. Vere calls me a chatter-box."

"Vere ought to be ashamed of himself."

"Not a bit of it! I don't look upon him as a cousin, but as a brother—only brothers are seldom a thousandth part as good."

"True enough," observed Hazlemere. "He has been more than a brother to me. By the way, he told me last night something about dropping in at your house this evening, on the chance of finding you in."

"I shall be at home; I have some people dining with me. Young Charlie Welby is one of them."

"Ah! I met him too last night."

"At Lorraine's?"

"Oh, no; in Hanover Street—at Justin Harwood's house."

"Vere was there?" asked Emilie.

"Went with me," returned Hazlemere, his eyes on the easel, and not the least idea that he had said anything which might best have been left unsaid.

"Lorraine at Harwood's!" said Emilie to herself, in a kind of dismay.

Was he, then, after all becoming fascinated with his too beautiful client? Lorraine was the last man to go anywhere for the sake of play. Beryl Carolan, and Beryl only, could be the attraction.

And May thought of Enid; Beryl would be a terrible rival. Lorraine, surely, could not marry her; but that need not save him from giving his love to her; and she was one of those women for whom men fling aside everything—home, friends, career. Alas! for Enid; and alas! too, for Vere Lorraine, if he should give his heart, perhaps

even his honor, into the keeping of this woman, whose past life was a mystery, whose name was not free from taint.

CHAPTER XI.

A REQUEST.

“HALLOO, Lorraine! whither away?” exclaimed Ulric Hazlemere, meeting his friend on Sunday afternoon in Saville Row.

“To Hanover Street,” returned Lorraine, as they shook hands. “Were you coming to my diggings?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, turn back and call with me.”

But Hazlemere shook his head.

“No,” he said; “I’ll walk part of the way with you, but I won’t go in.”

They walked on. Lorraine glanced in the artist’s face, and asked:

“Is anything wrong, Hazlemere? Why not come in?”

The other flushed slightly.

“I’ll be frank with you, Lorraine,” he said. “I am getting rather afraid of going there.”

“Afraid of the cards, Hazlemere, or of Beryl Carolan?”

“The last; and I have sense enough to keep out of the way. I mean to try it, at any rate. That girl would fascinate an anchorite; and, of course, it would be madness to get thinking too much of her.”

Lorraine set his teeth. Madness—yes! No man could dream of marrying Beryl Carolan! He said, quietly:

“You are wise, Hazlemere.”

Though he was not looking at the artist, he caught and read the quick look Hazlemere gave, and he smiled.

““Physician, heal thyself,”” he said. “Is that it, Hazlemere?”

“Lorraine, forgive me.”

“There is no cause. Say on what is in your heart to say, Ulric.”

“You won’t be offended?—no, I don’t mean that. You know what I *do* mean.”

“Yes. Well?”

“Why, I wish you’d haul off, Lorraine, that’s all about it. One can’t just flirt with a woman like that. You find

yourself in love with her before you know where you are, and *you're* not a man to play with fire."

"No?"

"You know it yourself, Lorraine. You are a slumbering volcano. Your love would be what few men's love is—an integral part of life."

"Ay, you are right, Hazlemere—right in all you say—right in warning me. I wish I could follow your counsel."

"Lorraine, for Heaven's sake—"

"No more, Ulric, it would be no use. I have a strong will, you say—a will that brooks no obstacles—a will that once set, as you sometimes say to me, is set like a flint. Well, the will is wanting here, or it is set the wrong way."

Pale though the speaker always was, Hazlemere, looking in his face now, saw that it was deathly white. For a minute the artist was silent, too startled, too pained and bewildered to speak; then he said, slowly:

"I understand. It's no use, but I wish to Heaven you had never met that girl!"

"I sometimes wish it, Ulric. But—" they had nearly reached Harwood's house now. Lorraine paused. "Blame me," he went on, "as I deserve. Judge me fool, madman, or villain, but she is blameless. Don't judge her, Ulric."

Their hands met.

"No need, Lorraine," said the younger man, "for Beryl Carolan to try to win a man. She can not help it. Good-bye!"

He turned away. His heart was full—he felt choking. Where would it end if Vere Lorraine gave his heart to this woman, whom to marry would be almost social effacement? Where *could* it end, unless she were strong enough to withstand temptation? Would Lorraine, then, give her his name? Could that blot out the prisoner's dock and the gambler's *salon*?

"If I were so mad!" groaned Hazlemere. "I am only a struggling artist—a nobody; but Lorraine has everything to lose; he has noble birth, high connection, high standing in his profession and in society. Will he fling away everything for a woman's sake? Yet this woman—I used to wonder at the siege of Troy. I think I can understand it now."

Meanwhile, Lorraine had asked for Miss Carolan, and

had been told that she was at home, and he was shown into the drawing-room, where were Harwood, and Beryl, and two callers—Malleeson the author, and a young French actor. Beryl gave her hand with a smile to the new-comer, and after introducing the Frenchman as Monsieur Marceau, she intimated to Lorraine a chair near her own, adding:

“Monsieur Marceau speaks very little English, Mr. Lorraine, but you, I know, are as good a Frenchman as he is, so there will be no difficulty, and you can take lessons, Mr. Malleeson.”

“I have had some already,” said Malleeson. “One would think you were a Parisienne to hear you talk, Miss Carolan.”

She laughed.

“I am a cosmopolitan,” she said; “no country is mine.”

“I think you have been everywhere,” said Marceau.

“That’s true,” said Harwood, who, as usual, reclined on a sofa. He spoke French fluently, but with an indifferent accent. “It would be easier to count the omissions.”

“What are they?” said Malleeson.

“Asia and Australia.”

“But you have been in Australia, Mr. Harwood?” said Lorraine.

Harwood shook his head.

“No,” he said; “never. What makes you think so? Do I look like a ‘corn-stalk’?” laughing, for he was of stalwart and robust frame.

“Certainly not,” returned Lorraine. “It was nothing in your appearance gave me the impression.”

“What then? Don’t be afraid of giving offense. I’m not very thin-skinned.”

“I shouldn’t imagine you were,” said Lorraine, inwardly; but aloud: “It was an intonation—a pronunciation now and then, that sounds Australian.”

“Add,” said Harwood, “what you are too polite to add—some roughness—brusquerie—want of polish, eh? But America is responsible for that, not Australia, as well as for the intonation and the other. How came you, though, to know much of corn-stalk twang? Have you been in the country?”

“Yes, years ago,” said Lorraine, carelessly. “I-traveled through parts of Australia.”

"What an odd place to travel in," interposed Malleson.

"I wanted to break new ground; I had been over all the old ground."

"So you went in for kangaroos and gum-trees," said Harwood, laughing. "How did you like them?"

"Better than some of the people I met," replied Lorraine.

"Did not the barbarous people always show you kindness?" asked Beryl, smiling.

Lorraine turned to her, face and voice softening at once.

"Generally—yes," he said; "I was not speaking of the rule."

There was a touch of reserve in his manner which did not encourage further questions, and Beryl asked none. Harwood's perceptions, however, were not sensitive. He said in his abrupt way:

"You had some disagreeable adventures, eh? Mayn't we hear them?"

"Thanks," said Lorraine, nonchalantly; "but I don't want to pose as an egotist."

"Oh, all right!" said Harwood, with a disagreeable laugh, which conveyed the impression that he thought Lorraine's "adventures" were partly of a character which he preferred to keep to himself.

Beryl's cheek flushed slightly, and there was a quick gleam of anger and pain in her violet eyes. Lorraine felt, for her sake far more than for his own, as if it would have been a genuine pleasure to throw Justin Harwood out of the window. The man's coarse nature disgusted him; every fiber of his frame was antagonistic to it; and even Harwood's infirmity could not stir in him much of the pity which it is usually the privilege of suffering to evoke.

The entrance of a servant created a diversion which, otherwise, Lorraine himself would have brought about.

He brought a letter for Beryl; she glanced at it carelessly, and flung it on the table near her.

"Is that how you treat a *billet-doux*?" said young Marceau, lifting his hands.

"It is not a *billet-doux*, *mon cher*," returned the girl; "and if it were I should treat it just the same."

"You frighten me."

Beryl raised her brows.

"Do you mean to say that you contemplate writing me

one, Anatole?" she said. "Do, there's a good boy; it would be so funny!"

"You are very, very cruel!" exclaimed the young man, in mock heroics. "Have I not already—"

"Written me dozens, and I have not kept one," said Beryl, gravely. "Mr. Lorraine," turning to him, "Anatole played with me once in Florence in dreadfully French-Italian, and I used to teach him his parts, and teased him as well; so we are old friend, you see."

"Friends of the heart!" added Marceau, laying his hand on his heart.

"And therefore constantly quarreling, I suppose," observed Lorraine, with perfect gravity.

"Monsieur, no! Who could quarrel with mademoiselle?"

"Silence!" said mademoiselle, "and ring the bell," which Marceau did submissively. But, all the same, Beryl saw him glance more than once jealously at Lorraine's handsome face; and while the servant was bringing in the tea, he asked her, *sotto voce*, who "*ce beau* Monsieur Lorraine" was. "A very distinguished aristocrat, no doubt," he added.

"Unquestionably," she answered; "he belongs to one of the noblest families in England."

"Is he often here?"

"Now, Anatole, I won't have any nonsense, you know, or I *shall* quarrel with you. Please to hand Mr. Malleson his tea, and don't frown."

During tea conversation became general; and afterward, Malleson and Marceau, having other engagements, rose to take leave, Beryl telling the latter to come in the following morning to read English.

The two men went out, and Beryl took up the letter she had thrown aside.

"Please excuse me," she said to Lorraine, and opening the envelope, skimmed through the letter, and put it down again.

"Whom from?" asked Harwood, "if I may know."

"Oh, yes; from Gresham."

"And what does he want?" said Harwood, glancing covertly at Lorraine, but obtaining no satisfaction.

"He has a box for the new piece at the Thespian tomorrow evening; he asks me to go."

"You'll go, of course?"

"No, I am not going."

"Are you engaged?"

"So far as Herbert Gresham is concerned, yes."

Harwood turned aside, frowning heavily. Lorraine made some remark to Beryl about the new play, and while she answered him, Harwood raised himself, and took his crutches, which always stood near his couch.

"Won't you stay to dinner, Mr. Lorraine?" he asked.

"Thanks, Mr. Harwood; but I have an engagement for this evening."

"Well, perhaps we shall see you later?" said Harwood, beginning to hobble toward the door. Beryl did not, by word or look, second the invitation.

"You are very kind," said Lorraine; "but I think not."

He rose and opened the door for Harwood, who nodded thanks—and then Lorraine returned to Beryl; but he did not resume his seat; he paused by the mantel-piece, leaning his arm on it. For just one second he hesitated—perhaps a brief struggle with temptation; then he bent down a little.

"Miss Carolan," he said, "it may sound presumptuous to ask if you will do me the honor of accepting my escort to-morrow evening?"

Beryl started; but the very intensity of feeling seemed to give her the greater self-mastery. Ah! what happiness to be with him alone for a whole evening! Why did he tempt her so?

She turned her head aside a little.

"No, it is not presumptuous," she said. "Thank you very, very much; but will you allow me to decline?"

"Not if I can persuade you to accept, Miss Carolan."

She went with others, why not with him? It could not be that she trusted him less.

He made a step forward and took the vacant place by her side. She was sitting on a lounge now.

"It is selfish, I know," he said, softly, "to urge my request, since I am pleading for my own happiness; but will you not change 'no' to 'yes'?"

Poor Beryl! her heart throbbing, every nerve trembling, temptation so overwhelming held before her, and only a moment of time to choose right or wrong.

"The woman who hesitates is lost." Beryl hesitated, and yielded.

"I suppose," she said, smiling a little, "that, since you are so kind, I must say 'yes.'"

"A thousand thanks! The kindness is all yours. When shall I call for you?"

"Will you not dine with us at seven? That will give us enough time, I think."

"Quite enough. I shall be very happy." He rose as he spoke. "And now," he added, "I must take my leave. *Au revoir.*"

She gave him her hand. How her touch made all his pulses bound! How closely—though only for a moment—his clasp infolded that little hand! Then once more "Adieu," and Beryl was alone again.

She would not suffer herself to think now. "Wrong! wrong!" her conscience whispered; but she would not heed it.

She rose quickly, and in feverish haste wrote a few lines to Gresham. She could not go with him to-morrow evening, she said; she was engaged. She was vexed and angry with him for asking her, and so would not in any way soften her refusal. She did not choose to be seen with him. He was the husband of the woman who was as dear to Vere Lorraine as a sister. Emilie Gresham should have no stab from the hand of Beryl Carolan.

And Vere Lorraine? Was he walking blindly, not seeing into the future? or was he half willfully, half unconsciously, putting it from him? Was the past a clear record? Were there no doubts, no fears, "no questions, and no replies?"

"A dream!" he said to himself, as he sat alone that night, and strove, but strove in vain, to pierce the shadows that clouded memory. "Oh, what would I not give to know the truth! There is ever a specter by my side, whose presence I feel while I can not discern its shape. By Heaven, I *will* be free!"

He rose, pressing his hand over his eyes, as if he would shut out some horrible vision; then he sunk into the chair again.

"What can the end be?" was the question the brain asked, and the heart could not answer. "I can not fly from this temptation," the white lips whispered. "I

sought it. It has entered in and taken possession. I am master no more, but servant. To know that she will be with me to-morrow is to know so much of heaven. To dream that her heart beats faster when I am near, that her spirit is with me when I am absent from her, is very ecstasy; and yet—and yet— No! it is too late—too late to draw back now. Was there ever a time since I first saw you, Beryl, when it was *not* too late to draw back?"

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE THESPIAN.

THE first nights at the Thespian were always brilliantly attended, and there had been a great deal of preliminary interest in the new play, which was written by two famous *collaborateurs*.

So, when Harwood's well-appointed brougham drove up to the box entrance of the theater, there was a long line of carriages extending into the remote distance, and beyond that yet another line of cabs, while round the portico clustered the usual ragamuffin crowd, to see "the swells" go in.

In such an assemblage there were sure to be numbers who knew Lorraine, and whom he knew; numbers who knew him, and who didn't know; while almost all would know Beryl Carolan by sight, and not a few had met her in society. Of these, the men she chanced to meet bowed or shook hands; the women, of course, ignored her; but, whatever she suffered, she gave no sign. She had grown used to the change, perhaps. One grows used even to dagger-thrusts.

Lorraine had secured a box on the first tier, second from the stage, and therefore in the best position; and the moment Beryl Carolan appeared, every glass, whose owners could see the box, was leveled at her.

Certainly no woman "in front" that night could compare with her; and her plush robe, of that wonderful hue called "looking-glass," was peculiarly suited, so every one said, to the red-gold hair and pale, pure complexion.

"Who is with her?" people asked one another.

"They are well matched," said one. "What a handsome fellow! Who is he?"

And the man of whom the question was asked uttered a low whistle, then laughed.

"That's Vere Lorraine," he said—"her counsel in the diamond case."

"Is it? Is he, then—"

"Oh, I don't know. They say that Beryl Carolan is unapproachable."

"Then Lorraine had best take care," observed the first speaker, "for that girl could make a fool of any man; she is just bewildering."

Beryl did not seem affected by the scrutiny to which she was subjected. To be stared at had been her daily bread all her life, and since her trial she had become accustomed to the knowledge that there was an added piquancy to her position; but if she had not become callous, she had, at least, to some extent, become case-hardened, though tonight the fire of countless eyes seemed to burn her, as they had that day in the court.

Was it because Vere Lorraine was with her, and he was to her what no other man was?

And yet the happiness of being by his side, though so full of pain, was greater than all pain. If only the suffering could have been quite banished—if only for just this evening—for these two hours, she could have put away past and future, and lived only in the present—in the golden haze of that happiness which, on earth, has no parallel.

She leaned back, scanning the house, and almost immediately she was bowing to Rowcliffe, Malleeson, and Lord Charles Welby, and several others in the stalls, then to one of a group in an opposite box; but she drew in her breath with a quick, sharp pain at her heart as she saw, in the next box, Mrs. Roden, Enid, May, and a lady she did not know, who, the next moment bowed, or, rather, nodded, and smiled at Lorraine. Enid's face Beryl could not see; the girl sat half behind the curtain.

"There is my cousin, Emmie Gresham," said Lorraine, in explanation, and returning the bows of Mrs. Roden and May; the former had not been quite sure about "seeing" him, under the circumstances, as Lorraine perfectly well perceived.

Beryl gazed a moment keenly, though covertly, at Emmie's features; then she said, slowly:

"I like her face very, very much."

"I am so glad to hear you say that," said Lorraine, earnestly, "for Emmie could not be dearer to me if she had been my born sister."

It flashed across the girl bitterly, "What can my good opinion be worth?" but she only remarked:

"She is very good, isn't she? She goes among the poor, I mean?"

"Not as a visiting lady," said Lorraine, smiling a little. "Emmie is very much interested in a mission in the East End; she gets up concerts and entertainments for the people, and sings for them, and so on. I met the priest—a new-comer—at her house on Thursday evening, and she has enlisted May Roden in the service now."

"Has she tried to enlist you, too?"

"No." Lorraine laughed. "Emmie knows me too well. The priest, Mr. Harrington, made an effort."

"Mr. Harrington!" repeated Beryl, after a second's pause.

"Yes; do you know the name?"

"I have known more than one Harrington, but they were not priests; they might have had clerical relations. What is this man's Christian name?"

"Bernard. I fancied his face was not wholly unfamiliar; but I don't think I ever came across him; perhaps in Sydney—he has been there, he told me."

"In Sydney? Ah! then he is a colonial?" said Beryl.

"He was some years in Australia; but he only mentioned Sydney particularly. I like the man very much; he seems quite an ideal priest—a man of the world—but not a worldly man; out and out High Church, as some people call it, of course."

"But so are you, are you not?" asked Beryl.

"I was brought up so—I never knew anything else," said Lorraine.

"I was never 'brought up' at all," was on Beryl's lips, but did not pass them; but the bitter thought must have flashed unbidden into her eyes, for she felt, she scarcely knew how, for there was no change in Lorraine's face, that he was deeply pained. If, however, he had meant to say anything, the ringing of the call-bell either prevented him, or saved him the necessity, as the case might be.

Just as the curtain was going up, the door of the box

next to Lorraine's was opened, and a party of three or four persons entered. Beryl caught the voice of one of the men, and inwardly started. It was Herbert Gresham who spoke. Lorraine heard also, and must, of course, have recognized the voice, but he kept his eyes fixed for a moment on the pretty rural scene disclosed, which was being vigorously applauded in front; then he glanced across at Emmie. She had drawn back, so that her face was partly in shadow; but her cousin's keen vision told him that she was agitated, though she bore herself bravely; and Lorraine set his teeth hard, while Beryl thought:

"If I had been with Gresham, what would his wife have thought of me? She must misjudge me now; but at least I do her no wrong. And Enid? She will not love me any more; poor Enid! Am I cruel to her? More cruel to *him*—far, far more cruel to him!"

It was fully twenty minutes before she knew what was going forward on the stage. Figures moved about and spoke, but what they said or did she did not know; then, with an effort, she forced herself to attend, and quickly picked up the thread of the story. By and by Lorraine turned to her with some remark about one of the performers, and his look in her face, though brief, was, she saw, very searching.

She half smiled.

"It opens well," she said, "and seems to give promise of a story not quite hackneyed."

"Yes; by the way, though, that expression used by the American—Dashford—is not an Americanism."

"He is supposed to be a ranchman," said Beryl, drawing in her breath silently.

"But what he said was bushranger's *argot*—Australian—not Californian," replied Lorraine.

"Is it? I did not know."

Had Lorraine made that remark by design? she asked herself. She remembered what he had said yesterday of Justin Harwood—an expression, an intonation, that sounded Australian. Had he accepted Harwood's explanation mentally? He had not verbally; and now the distinction he had pointed out seemed to lend further significance to his observation of the previous day. Did he not believe Harwood's disclaimer of ever having been in Australia?

Beryl felt sure that Lorraine disliked Harwood, and equally sure that he would not believe a word uttered by that gentleman, if there was any conceivable reason why the latter should be stating an untruth. But she was content for the present, to let the matter rest, and seem, whether she was so or not, interested in the play.

The act-drop fell, and then the tide of talk began to flow, and friends made their way to each other's boxes and stalls and exchanged greetings and comments on the new piece.

"Who's in the box next to us?" said Gresham's voice, distinctly heard in the said box; "everybody's staring at it."

Some one tried, evidently, to look round the corner, for the answer came after a moment's pause:

"I can't see--some celebrity, that's clear. There's Dixon in the stalls—I'll beckon him up—he'll know."

"There are some things about Herbert Gresham," said Beryl, "that makes one feel he is not wholly bad—sometimes I like him—sometimes just the opposite."

"And you disliked him yesterday?" said Lorraine. "Was that it?"

"Oh, no!" the girl answered, quietly. "I have only once been anywhere with him—that was to a *matinée*. I have always refused since; but he does not, or will not understand me."

Lorraine set his teeth hard.

"Miss Carolan," he said, when he could be sure of not betraying too much in his voice, "has Gresham dared—"

"To insult me?" put in Beryl, in the same quiet manner; "if he had done so, would it be fair to blame him? No—it is not that; but—perhaps I should not say what I am going to say; yet I am sure you will make allowance for me."

"I am sure," he said, softly, "that you can stand in no need of such allowance, Miss Carolan. I hope you will treat me always as a true friend."

Beryl turned her head aside; the beating of her heart almost choked her. She had made up her mind to say to Lorraine to-night, "Come to this house no more," and now the resolution faltered—died.

Friend! Yes, he was the only one who, if there was

passion in his heart, was still friend also—the only one she could trust—the only one who believed her guiltless.

“Thank you,” she said in a low tone. “Then I will speak. I want your cousin to know that, though I can not prevent her husband from coming to Hanover Street, I do not encourage him; but I have tried to make him keep away—in vain. I don’t ask her to think better of me than I seem to deserve, but only this—that Mr. Gresham holds no higher place in my thoughts than any other of the men who profess to worship me.”

“I understand,” said Lorraine, gently; “and I will tell Emmie this. You thanked me; let me rather thank you for your confidence in me.”

Beryl shook her head.

“I can not help that,” she said, with a *naïveté* that, though it might, in one sense, sound strange from her lips, was yet not out of keeping—at least, so Lorraine thought; though many men would have been surprised, or imagined the girl was coquetting.

A slight flush crossed the man’s dark cheek, and for a second his lips quivered. Did Beryl know all that frank confession meant for him? He turned toward her—his face was in the shadow of the curtain, and the impulsive words passed his lips before the thought came to check them.

“I will never fail you,” he said.

Beryl dared not meet his eyes in that moment, and she could not speak. Amid the tempest of wild joy that filled her heart, and made her deaf to all but the voice—the words—that said so much, was the deadly fear that she had done irrevocable wrong; that she had played too long with temptation.

Too long! It was scarcely more than the other day that Vere Lorraine had come to Hanover Street; was it already too late to bid him look to his own peace?

“Why did I come with him to-night?” was the question; to which came the reply, “You let your heart conquer; you let *him* conquer, because you love him, and you know that you are at least nearer his heart than any other living woman.”

Was it indeed too late to draw back?

Lorraine, perhaps misinterpreting her silence, bent forward a little.

"You are not offended with me?" he said, with that wonderful softness in his musical voice that more betrays a man's heart than even his eyes.

"Oh, no, not offended," said Beryl, hurriedly; every nerve in her frame was quivering. "How could you think that?"

"Forgive me. I spoke on impulse."

"And you spoke generously. See! the curtain is rising."

And in the next box Herbert Gresham was gnawing his lip and fuming inwardly, and outwardly too in a fashion, for Dixon had told him Beryl Carolan was next door to him, with Vere Lorraine. She had written to him, Gresham, in off-hand style, and come, after all—and with Lorraine, of all men!

There was no more pleasure for Gresham that evening. There had been little at the first, for he had chafed and rebelled under Beryl's refusal; but to have her in the house, not with him, and with another man, was gall and wormwood.

Nor was the atmosphere in the Rodens' box free from electricity. Mrs. Roden was deeply angry with Lorraine, Emmie was troubled, and poor Enid felt as if the earth were melting under her feet. What chance had she against the dazzling loveliness of Beryl Carolan? With the unreasoning haste of jealousy she blamed Beryl. Beryl would like, no doubt, to have such a man as Vere Lorraine at her feet, and his happiness would count for little.

So, for more than one in front this evening, the play was *not* "the thing."

The curtain fell amid a storm of applause, calls for the artists and the authors, and Beryl rose.

"It is really a good play," she said, "and ought to run. Thanks so much," as Lorraine put the rich plush mantle over her shoulders, drawing it carefully round her with a tenderness of action and touch that was more than a man's ordinary attention to a beautiful woman.

Then he led her out and succeeded in getting the brougham up in a few minutes.

"You will come to supper, will you not?" Beryl asked, as they drove off. "There will be only Justin and, perhaps, a few others. No cards to-night."

"I will come in with pleasure."

It was a small party at supper, and, outwardly, at any rate, a merry one. But Lorraine, while he talked brilliantly, was far from being at ease in his heart; and Beryl, while her laugh was brightest, cried loudest within her soul in pain and dread and vain longing.

When the guests had taken their leave, and Harwood and Beryl were alone, the girl was turning to go to her room, when her uncle stopped her.

"Say, Beryl," he observed, "Lorraine is an acquisition. *He* doesn't come for the cards; but, all the same, he plays—for a footing."

"I warned you," said Beryl, coolly, "the first night he came. You can't fool him as you can the others."

"Why, he'd never suspect me," said Harwood, a little uneasily.

"He has taken your measure more accurately than you imagine, Justin. He doesn't trust you one bit. He didn't believe you yesterday."

"You're mighty sharp, my girl."

"A good deal sharper than you, as you have often found. Be always on your guard with him. I wish he had never come here."

"What d'you mean? Because he may get to know too much?"

"For every reason."

Her hand was on the door as she spoke.

"Your infernal sentimentality among others, I suppose?" said Harwood, harshly. "But don't you go driving him away; mind that!"

"No heroics, Justin. You know how little I care for them."

"You'll have to care!" muttered Harwood; "and if you snub Gresham too much—"

"He won't come here," concluded Beryl. "So much the better."

"If you break through the contract, Beryl—" began Harwood, menacingly.

"*You'll* break through it," she said, once more concluding his unfinished sentence, "will you? Are you fond of stone cells and prison fare? You have escaped them all these years, but take care how you come to a close reckoning with *me*! You will find me as ruthless as you are

yourself, and with the power as well as the will to crush you!"

And to those words Justin Harwood had no answer.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT ST. EANSWYTHE'S.

"DEAR VERE,—Enid and I are going to drive down to-morrow morning to service at St. Eanswythe's, and afterward dine at the clergy-house with Mr. Harrington. Please join us, there's the dear fellow you are! Mr. Harrington is very anxious to improve your acquaintance. Be with me by nine-thirty; and if not convenient to send reply to this, I will call for you *en route*, on the chance of your coming.

Yours,

"EMMIE."

Lorraine received this letter at his chambers on Saturday afternoon. He had not seen either his cousin or Enid since that Monday night at the Thespian; and however busy he was, he had always contrived to see Emmie at least once in a week.

His conscience smote him. He could not, if he would, have refused her request. So, knowing that he should be detained late that night reading a heavy brief, he wrote a line, promising to be in Norfolk Street at the hour named, and dispatched it by a junior clerk.

"I want, too," he said inwardly, as he turned back to the brief he was reading, "to see more of this priest. Where have I seen his face before, or is it a mere resemblance to some one else I have met?"

At half past nine the following morning he walked into Emmie's breakfast-room, and she sprung up from the table to greet him.

"How kind of you to come!" she said. "I know you only do it to please me."

"And in so doing I please myself also, Emmie, dear."

"Unselfish fellow! I know you do. Sit down and have some breakfast."

"Thanks; I have breakfasted. You know I am always an early bird."

"Or I should never have ventured to ask you to turn up at nine-thirty. Catch me asking any other man I can

think of to do the same, even in the summer-time! I expect Enid here a little before ten."

Emmie made no allusion to the play last Monday. She talked mostly about the approaching "entertainment," and Lorraine felt genuinely interested in it because his cousin was; and about ten minutes to ten Enid made her appearance, looking very pretty in her velvet and furs, and prettier still when the color rose into her cheek, as Lorraine came forward to shake hands.

"I pressed Vere into the service," said Emmie, laughing—"made him pious whether he would or not. Come; we must be off. The carriage is waiting, and it is a long drive to Paradise Street."

However jealous Enid might be of Beryl Carolan, however much inclined, in Lorraine's absence, to resent his apparent "infatuation" for the girl who now ranked almost as an "adventuress," she yielded to the fascination of his presence; and as he naturally, as in courtesy bound, talked more to her than to Emmie, Enid's hopes began to rise again, and she was once more happy.

"He does not know, he does not imagine," thought Emmie, "that Enid is growing to like him too much; in fact, she's in love with him. And, after all, if I could tell him—it's best to 'let well alone.' No good ever comes of meddling."

The denizens of Paradise Street did not often see a carriage, and quite a little crowd gathered around the doors of the iron mission church to stare at the "kerridge" and the "West End swells," and the windows were peopled with unkempt heads. A good many of the women and girls were in Sunday costume. This usually consisted of a beflounced gown of red or violet, a brilliant shawl, crossed over the bosom and tied behind, and a white apron. Bonnets being "few and far between," head-gear is not *de rigueur* among the ladies of the East End; but all the girls rejoiced in straight-combed fringes which almost covered their eyebrows.

Remarks more or less personal were openly uttered as the trio passed into the church; and Emmie's coachman came in for a good deal of not ill-natured "chaff," which he received with the sublime dignity only attainable by a Mayfair male servant.

The interior of the church was bright and attractive.

Owing to Emmie's care and her own and Lorraine's money—for he had given to her freely, only stipulating that his name did not appear—the altar was richly appointed, the otherwise bare walls were adorned with sacred pictures and texts, and there were two or three images of saints, more artistic than images in churches usually are.

The church was already so crowded—all the people being of the poorest class—that the new-comers only found room near the door; and a minute later Lorraine gave up his place to a coster-woman.

The service, the congregation—far more reverent and devout than that of many a West End church—were an entirely new experience to Enid Roden, and she would have enjoyed it more thoroughly if she had been able to keep her thoughts from straying to Vere Lorraine, whose own thoughts often strayed also, alas! but never to pretty Enid, kneeling almost under his eyes.

After the service, Emmie, outside, had a little knot of men and women around her, and was shaking hands with and talking pleasantly to all and sundry, while Enid stood by, half amused, half wondering, and Lorraine entered into conversation with an old dock laborer, and set the children running races after pence or silver, whichever turned up.

"I am afraid, Mr. Lorraine," said the full, clear voice of Mr. Harrington behind him, "that you are demoralizing my people."

Lorraine turned quickly, raising his hat, and meeting the priest's extended hand.

"*Mea maxima culpa!*" he said, laughing; "but I don't fancy the money will do them much harm."

"But don't you see that you are teaching the children cupidity? Have you the least idea that a sixpence—I saw you throw more than one—is a fortune to a child in these parts?"

"I confess I never thought of that. The only reparation I can make is to advise those lucky sixpence-holders to invest their gains in sound securities."

Mr. Harrington laughed merrily.

"Trust a lawyer for getting the best of it," he said. "Ah! Mrs. Gresham."

Emmie introduced Enid and the speaker, and then they

all turned toward the clergy-house, which was simply one of the houses in Paradise Street, thoroughly repaired and cleaned up, and with a cross over the door.

The room in which dinner was presently served was only partially carpeted, and furnished in the simplest fashion. There was a large crucifix above the mantel-piece, and some sacred pictures on the walls. Yet this room seemed home-like; and there was a splendid fire in the grate.

Bernard Harrington was a tall, wiry-built man of perhaps forty-five, though his thick black hair was already turning gray. His features were strongly marked, and his dark-brown eyes very keen, but as soft as a woman's; the dark lines of his skin were due more to exposure to tropical suns than to nature.

He was clean shaved, and might have posed in some respects for a portrait of St. Bernard, or some other old crusading monk, but that you could never imagine him a bigot. A more lovable face man never had; not one weak line in it—and not one hard line.

The dinner, like the room, was very simple; but none of those who partook of it were given to caring about what they eat, and the “feast of reason and flow of soul” seasons the plainest fare.

Mr. Harrington was a delightful companion, a thoroughly cultivated man, who had seen a great deal of the world and studied men and things, but whom experience had not hardened. He never obtruded the priest, but you could never forget that he was one. There was about him and all that he said and did that kind of atmosphere of a pure and elevated tone of thought which is like the scent of incense in a church, seeming to penetrate all the senses.

By and by, conversation turning upon traveling out of beaten tracks, Lorraine said to the priest:

“Do you know that the first time I saw you your face struck me as not wholly strange to me.”

“Indeed!” said Mr. Harrington. “Where could you have seen me? I had charge of a mission in Sydney about eight years ago; were you in Australia at the time?”

“No,” returned Lorraine; “it was ten years ago that I visited Australia. I was in Sydney; but then my time was anterior to yours. Have you been in America?”

“I have passed through the Southern States, and I have been in India—Calcutta, and up country. I left Australia

nearly seven years ago, and I came to England about a year ago, and worked in Liverpool until I took charge of this mission."

"I must have seen some one like you, then," said Lorraine. "If I had seen you yourself distinctly, I should have known you again; and yet, your voice sometimes makes me start, as if I had heard it before."

"Strange! You have a good memory for voices?"

Lorraine smiled.

"I don't think," he said, "that I ever forget a voice I have known. I have recognized men by their voices through very clever disguises."

"And you think, then, that you have heard mine?"

"I don't know what to think. I feel that I have, and reason tells me I am mistaken, but something—in one sense stronger than reason—tells me I am not mistaken."

The priest smiled.

"Well," he said, "some day the mystery may be solved."

"Like the mystery in a novel," said Emmie, laughing. "Now, look here, Mr. Harrington"—the meal was over now—"you are not going to run away to the schools at once, are you?"

He put his hand into his cassock and drew forth his watch.

"I can spare half an hour," he said, "and I have told Mrs. Wardlaw to bring up coffee, in honor of my West End guests."

"Don't you, then, indulge in that luxury?" asked Enid, as they gathered round the fire, Lorraine sitting next to Enid.

He shook his head.

"I have no time for luxuries," said he, lightly.

"Then we are corrupting his reverence's morals," observed Lorraine, gravely. "I must inveigle you to my chambers in Albemarle Street some day, Mr. Harrington, and see what further mischief I can do."

"I shall be delighted to be inveigled," replied the priest, "and I don't think there's much danger."

"Of my trying, or your yielding?"

"Well, I meant the first."

"Thanks for your good opinion; I should have meant the last."

Coffee was just then brought in, and Mrs. Wardlaw, the housekeeper, proved herself an adept in the making of it.

While Mr. Harrington and Emmie discussed some details of the coming concert, Lorraine talked apart with Enid; and as he bent over the girl, and she listened to the charm of his soft voice, Mr. Harrington glanced more than once toward the two, and presently said in a low tone to Mrs. Gresham:

“Mr. Lorraine has known Miss Roden a long time?”

“Not very long. But why?”

The other smiled.

“‘Remembering how I love your company,’” he quoted. “Length of time is not always needed, is it?”

“Oh! I understand you,” said Emmie. “Her parents would be delighted if he should like Enid; and she—”

“Is certainly not displeased to have him talk with her,” said the priest, a slight shade of anxiety crossing his face as he spoke. “That is only natural; he is a most attractive man. Well, I must tear myself away. You don’t know what a treat it has been to me to be with cultivated people.”

They all rose as he did.

“You were awfully good,” said Emmie, “to let us come; and we’ve enjoyed ourselves so much that we shall want to invade you again.”

“Pray do; you will be heartily welcome.”

Farewells and promises of meeting again were exchanged, and then the visitors departed, and Mr. Harrington took his way to the schools; but as he walked onward, he said to himself:

“Is Vere Lorraine growing to love Enid Roden? I hope not; and yet there may be no reason for interference. So! he thinks he has seen my face—heard my voice before. H’m!”

CHAPTER XIV.

A PLAIN EXPLANATION.

“MR. GRESHAM!” said Beryl, looking up in surprise. It was early in the afternoon, and she was practicing some songs at the piano. “Well, Andrews, ask him to come up.” She rose, and crossed the room to the fire-place. “So!” she said to herself, “a whole week he has kept

away, and he can't keep away any longer; but he wants an explanation. How absurd!"

The door opened, and Herbert Gresham came in. Beryl held out her hand carelessly.

"Good-morning," she said, coolly.

Gresham held her hand with a grip that almost hurt her; his face was stormy and troubled.

"You are very cruel to me," he said, huskily.

"You are melodramatic," returned the girl, coldly, and drawing her hand away. "I really don't understand you, Mr. Gresham."

"You don't understand?" he said. "Why, last Monday you refused my escort and accepted Lorraine's!"

Beryl looked at him a moment steadily.

"I am free," she said, quietly, "to choose my own companions, and free to tell you that I have given you no ground for assuming I have any special regard for you."

"It is not that, Beryl!—forgive me," as she interrupted him with a haughty gesture. "The name passed my lips unawares; but you decline again and again to tolerate my society. May I not ask why? Have I not always treated you with respect?"

"You would scarcely dare to do otherwise, Mr. Gresham," replied Beryl. "I have refused to go anywhere with you, and I thought that perhaps you would understand one at least of my reasons, and spare me the pain of speaking plainly. However, I will give you at least one reason for my refusal—you have a wife, Mr. Gresham!" The man started and recoiled, flushing crimson. "Pardon me," Beryl said, her manner instantly softening; "but since you have chosen to take offense at my proceedings and to ask an explanation, I thought it best, for both our sakes, to give one."

"Go on!" said Gresham, leaning his hand on the table, his head bent down.

"He is ashamed," Beryl said, inwardly. "He has, at least, so much grace." She went on: "Your wife is a pure-hearted, high-souled woman. I have not the honor to know her; she would not know me now; but I could not even seem to do her an injury. I would not have her think that I am in any way helping to alienate her husband from her. I will not be seen with you; it would be an insult to her. I have spoken frankly; forgive me if I

have pained you. Perhaps you did not expect such scruples from Beryl Carolan."

Gresham turned aside; his breast heaved. Perhaps in that minute his better nature was striving for conquest. Man of the world though he was, he could not but, in his inmost heart, honor the woman who respected another woman's honor. But if the better feeling had not taken root, to bear fruit later, it yielded, for the present, to passions too long rampant to be easily displaced.

Gresham strode to the door.

"So be it," he said. "I understand that a coquette has the right to be fickle. Good-morning."

"When you apologize for those words, Mr. Gresham," said Beryl, imperturbably, "you will set foot in this house again. Not before. Good-morning."

And the door closed upon Herbert Gresham.

CHAPTER XV.

OMNIA VINCIT AMOR.

"WELL, Hazlemere, and how does the portrait get on?" said Vere Lorraine, entering his friend's studio one evening; and Hazlemere, who was sketching a suggestion of some new picture, dropped his pencil, and turned eagerly to meet his friend.

"Why, Lorraine!" he exclaimed. "Awfully glad to see you! Been slashing into the jury, eh?"

Lorraine was leading counsel for the plaintiff in an important libel case.

"Yes, you see, I got the reply. Judgment to-morrow. The defendant hasn't a leg to stand upon; but the picture's the thing! Let me have a look at it."

"It's over here," said Hazlemere, leading the way, and turning the easel round to the light. "Of course, the colors don't show properly."

"But the likeness is wonderful, *mon cher*. You have just caught May's expression, and you are making of it what portrait-painters hardly ever produce—a picture."

"Thanks, Lorraine. I know the value of your judgment, and I'm glad I've succeeded in pleasing you."

"May is a gem!" said Lorraine, still looking thoughtfully at the picture.

He had no design in uttering the words; but glancing at Hazlemere's face, he saw that it was flushed, and the painter turned aside, and was unnecessarily busy over some sketches in a portfolio which he seemed suddenly desirous of arranging.

"Whew!" was Lorraine's inward comment; "sets the wind so!" Then aloud, after a pause: "Yes, you ought to make a hit with that portrait, Ulric. How often does your sitter come?"

"Twice a week." Still over the sketches.

"Another fortnight, then," said Lorraine, turning from the easel and laying his hand lightly on Hazlemere's shoulder, "and the gates of paradise will be closed."

Hazlemere started and winced under the gentle touch as if it hurt him.

"Lorraine!" he said under his breath.

"Ulric, forgive me, but do you think this is the first time I have suspected you? I haven't—one way or the other—seen much of you lately, but last time we met you were *distract*—there was a change in you—the old, old story, 'which ever abideth new.'"

"A miserable story for me!" broke from Hazlemere, as he flung himself into a chair and covered his eyes. "I never thought what I was drifting into until it was too late."

"Too late! Well?"

Something in his tone made Hazlemere raise his head with a quick wonder in his eyes.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"If May likes you—" began Lorraine.

The artist interrupted him with impatient bitterness.

"If she did," he said—"and why should she? How could I take advantage of it? I am a poor beggar of a painter, and she a rich man's daughter."

"Whose mother," added Lorraine, quietly, "would not stand in the way of her daughter's happiness, whatever the father might do; and Mrs. Roden is really the ruling spirit in that house—the wives usually are!"

Hazlemere sprung to his feet; then sunk down again.

"No, no, Lorraine," he said, huskily, "don't tempt me—don't tempt me!"

"Am I a man to hold out delusive hopes, Ulric? Be reasonable. I know that at present your lips are sealed. It

would be a breach of trust to take advantage of your present position in regard to May; but by and by you may be able to act more freely. The girl is not mercenary; she would not stop to think whether you were rich or poor. Don't give up all for lost because just now she seems so far above you."

Hazlemere stretched out his right hand and clasped that of his friend closely, in silence, his left hand veiling his eyes again; the revulsion of feeling, the sudden rush of joy, made him for a few moments almost dizzy; but presently he looked up.

"Lorraine," he said, "you have given me a fresh lease of life!"

The danger now was that he might hope too much; it was his nature to run to extremes—to be either down in the depths, or up on the heights; but Lorraine did not try to damp the hopes he had raised, even though they far outran his suggestions. He listened to Hazlemere's rhapsodies about May with more than patience—for patience only endures—but with that sympathy which makes a friend's joys and sorrows one's own, and he even outstayed his original intentions (yet he was going to Hanover Street this evening), and did not at last leave Melbury Road until past eleven; but he told the cabman who drove him into town again to go as fast as possible; and cabby, perceiving that he had a "swell" fare (swell including well off in a cabman's vocabulary), drove at a rattling pace, and was rewarded, when he pulled up before the house in Hanover Street, with fully three times his proper fare.

As Lorraine ascended the stairs to the drawing-room, he heard mingled sounds of talking, laughter, piano, and singing, the latter being a fairly good barytone voice singing a *barcarolle*.

"Don't announce me," he said to the footman; and gently opening the door, he entered the room.

Several men were standing or lounging about, Herbert Gresham among them; by the piano stood Rowcliffe, the singer, and Beryl was playing his accompaniment for him. She saw Lorraine the instant he came in, but there was no change in her face. She did not falter for a second in her playing; she just glanced up with a smile and slight bend of her head as he approached the piano, and he answered the greeting silently, shook hands with some of the men,

and sat down on a lounge next to young Anatole Marceau. In the card-room were groups round the tables, Justin Harwood officiating as banker in a game of baccarat.

"They're playing for jolly high stakes there," observed one of the men to Lorraine, with a slight backward jerk of his head toward the card-room.

"They always do," returned the other, dryly, "especially at baccarat."

"And when Harwood is banker, eh?"

Lorraine pulled his mustache, but made no rejoinder to this. He glanced covertly at Gresham, who, he saw, had frowned when he entered the room; and this resentment, Lorraine knew, was less on Emmie's account than on Beryl Carolan's. Naturally, Emmie's husband and her cousin were scarcely on speaking terms; but this estrangement was Lorraine's doing, not Gresham's, who, on his side, would have been friendly enough with his wife's cousin, and, to do him justice, had no mean suspicion of the loyalty of either his wife or Lorraine; but Lorraine touched Gresham more nearly when he entered into rivalry in Beryl Carolan's regard than when he refused to be friends on account of the treatment Emilie had received.

"I like not Monsieur Harwood," observed Marceau to Lorraine, with a young man's frankness. "What say you?"

"That a close tongue makes a wise head, *mon cher*."

The Frenchman laughed.

"Ah! I am incautious," he said; "but you are safe. *Eh, bien!* I say to Beryl, why does she not leave him and go upon the stage again; but she says no, she is under a cloud. But as to that, *c'est un mystère*. Here she comes!"

The song was finished. Beryl rose from the piano and came forward to greet Lorraine; but now she scarcely smiled, and her manner struck him as a little cold. He gave her a very searching look; but she avoided his gaze, and almost instantly turned from him to speak to some one else.

Lorraine set his teeth, but gave no overt sign of being in any way affected by Beryl's manner. He sauntered into the card-room and began a game of euchre with three others. He played recklessly, and, as there is at least as much skill as chance in euchre, he lost. Once, when the

game was about half through, Beryl came near and stood looking on for a few minutes, and then she took Malleson's arm and strolled back into the drawing-room with him.

"Your play, Mr. Lorraine," said Standish.

Lorraine played, and lost again.

"My hand's not in to-night," he said, carelessly.

Beryl had gone to the piano again. In a moment her rich voice filled the rooms. Some of the men followed where the voice of the charmer led. Lorraine and his companions played on until the game was finished, then the other three went into the drawing-room; but Lorraine dropped into a chair near Harwood and began to talk to him, yielding his place presently to a man named Delves, who came to play a return game of *écarté* with Harwood.

Some of the men now began to leave, and there were not more than half a dozen left when Lorraine, entering the drawing-room, saw Beryl just saying good-bye to Anatole Marceau.

"It is quite late—or, rather, early enough—for you, Anatole, *mon cher*," she was saying, half laughing; "and I shall go in a few minutes. *Au revoir*."

"*Au revoir*, my adored Beryl."

Marceau kissed her hand with a flourish, and departed, and Beryl, turning, found herself face to face with Lorraine. But she was not startled out of her self-possession.

"May I ask you to forgive me," she said, half carelessly, "and to let me say good-night? I am so tired."

"Are you too tired," said Lorraine, gently, but with something in his tone and manner that warned her the gentleness only veiled stern determination, "to grant me a few minutes? I have hardly spoken to you this evening."

"*Eh bien!* you had the cards! Won't the 'few words' hold?"

Her heart was beating wildly; every nerve was quivering. For answer—they were in sight of the card-room—Lorraine drew her hand on to his arm, led her to a little *boudoir* opening out of the drawing-room, and placed her on a lounge near the fire.

Sitting down by her—strive as she would to maintain self-command, it was beginning to fail her now; she was trembling—Lorraine bent toward her and asked, quietly;

"What have I done to offend you, that you treat me as you have done to-night?"

For a moment no answer—her face was drooping, her eyes bent on the floor, her heart a very tumult of emotions—then the golden head was raised a little haughtily; she said, coldly:

"I don't understand your question, Mr. Lorraine."

"You understand it perfectly. Forgive me, but you are acting a part now, as you have done all the evening—unless I have offended you."

She did not resent his first words. How should she—were they not true? She said in a low tone:

"No, you have not offended me."

Lorraine looked down at the white hand lying on her knee; it was quite still, and yet he could see that every fiber was at tension. With an instinctive, impulsive movement he laid his own hand upon it lightly; but, as he felt the quiver that ran through that little hand, his clasp tightened, closing over the trembling fingers with convulsive force.

"Don't trifle with me," he said—and the passion that shook him was in his voice, though he strove to keep it down—"I can not bear it. Deal with me frankly—tell me why you were so changed to me to-night?"

Beryl tried to answer him, but no words would come. Even strength to struggle for self-command seemed all gone while his hand clasped hers, and her heart stood still in the fullness of the knowledge that he loved her. She turned and looked at him, like some dumb animal in mortal pain, and the hot color swept over cheek and brow, dyed her very throat, as she met the passionate worship of the man's dark eyes. Her own gaze sunk. In a sudden terror she tried to wrench her hand from his clasp, but in vain; that clasp only tightened the more, and Lorraine bent over the shrinking girl, speaking quick and low, throwing everything to the winds now for the love that filled his whole universe.

"Beryl," he said, "my own, my love, my darling, you do not fear me? you can not doubt me? I am yours, heart and soul, and honor."

"Oh, hush! hush!" broke from Beryl's white lips in a hoarse whisper. "For the love of Heaven, no more! You are mad to speak so to me!"

"Mad I am, if love be madness. And I love you. The whole world is nothing to me—less than nothing. I only know that I love you!"

"Ah!" she said, in agony, "why did I go to you? Why did we ever meet? And yet we parted—we might have been parted forever. What fate brought you here?"

"Fate! The fate that rules all men sooner or later, Beryl. I tried to keep away, but my will was crushed by a greater power. The very effort for self-conquest seemed to strengthen the longing that in the end mastered me. The first time I saw you it was like the beginning of a new life. My whole heart was bound up in gaining your acquittal. Did not your heart tell you, Beryl, that it was you who brought me here?"

"Yes, yes!" the girl muttered, brokenly, "and so I am the more guilty; but how could I say to you at first, 'You come for my sake, you must not come,' and then—then—" she faltered, flushing crimson, turning her face away.

"Then," Lorraine whispered, and now he lifted the hand he still held, pressing it to his throbbing heart, "then your own heart played you traitor, Beryl."

"Heaven forgive me!" she said, under her breath. "Heaven forgive me for the wrong I have done you!"

"Wrong! how do you wrong me in giving me what I would yield up all else that I possess to gain? Did I not seek you—try to win you?"

"But I!" she cried, with a bitter sob, "should have put the seas—the whole world between us—killed myself—rather than that you should waste your heart and life on such as I am!"

"Beryl!" his voice, his manner, as he spoke her name, startled her to the soul; he was white to the very lips. "Don't speak to me," he said, "as if you were unworthy of a man's worship. 'Such as you are,' pure, blameless, in heart and life, I love you, and you are mine!"

"No—no—not that—it can not, it *shall* not be!" broke from her. She started to her feet; but Lorraine, rising too, flung his arms round her, and drew her forcibly to his breast, folding her in a close embrace.

"It shall be!" he said, with a passion the more intense that it was not noisy, but deep and strong—the voice low and suppressed; but in the eyes that met Beryl's agonized gaze the man's whole soul burned. "The world condemns

you, but you are more to me than ten thousand worlds. I love you! You are my world—my all!”

He drew the beautiful head back against him, and laid his lips to hers; and those passionate kisses seemed to draw the girl's very life into his and make her will one with his own. Yet she was strong to resist through the very strength of her love; strong to turn from the dazzling light, and thrust herself into outer darkness. When at length her lover raised his head, she lay in his arms for a moment quite still, save for the trembling that shook her from head to foot; but as Lorraine's eyes searched her face, he saw the gathering resolve. He bent over her again, his lips touched her brow.

“My Beryl!” he whispered, tenderly, “my own love, mine forever now!”

“No—no! have pity—spare us both,” the girl gasped; “it is madness—madness—you know it can not be! No,” striving to free herself; “you *must* hear me!”

“Speak, then,” said Lorraine, setting his teeth, “say what you will; but you will not make me yield.”

He loosed his clasp and drew back. Beryl stood still a moment, pressing her hands to her heart, with that strange, “hunted” look in her eyes that is so terrible to see; but rallying herself with a supreme effort of will, she said, speaking at first falteringly, but more steadily as she went on:

“If I loved you less, I might yield to you; but I love you with my whole soul, and so—you must leave me. Think what I am—what at least I seem to be; and to the world we are what we seem to be. I, Beryl Carolan, a morally convicted thief, a woman at whose name other women shrug their shoulders—who rules over a *salon* to which men come, but not their wives and sisters. Can your name whiten mine? No; mine will blacken yours; you can not raise me; I shall drag you down. The world will see in your wife only a brilliant adventuress who knew her power, and used it—who fooled Vere Lorraine into giving her his name!”

“Beryl! Beryl!”

“Stay!” she said—“hear me still. If I am cruel, it is because I love you. Would the people among whom you live receive me? Why, if they missed a gold locket, or a diamond brooch, they would suspect Vere Lorraine's wife!

What are my credentials? In the present, the prisoner's dock—Justin Harwood's gambling *salon*!—in the past, who knows? Who knows if the very name I bear is my own? What do you, who would make me your wife, know of my past? Blameless—what then? If you"—she faltered a moment, and gripped the back of the chair near her to steady herself; then went on, more slowly—"if you should meet men who told you they had met your wife five years ago in Justin Harwood's *salon* at Barcelona, how would you answer them? Do you think this is the first time? Live it down? No—no! A man may live down a past steeped in sin; a woman can never live down even the semblance of sin!"

Lorraine had sunk into a chair, covering his eyes with his hand, his teeth clinched, his face ashen white with the agony he was enduring, and would endure, since Beryl so willed it. If only she had spoken one word that was not truth—horrible, naked truth! And yet he had fought this battle in his own heart, and still love had conquered.

As she ceased now, he dropped his hand, and rose.

"Beryl," he said, with the quietness which is so unquiet, "do you think you have given me one stab my own hand has not already dealt me? uttered one pitiless truth that has not stared me in the face? Did I not struggle against the power that drew me to you, because all that you have said to me rose up and warned and defied me? I loved a woman whom the world condemns—and dared I even to say, condemns unjustly? And to me the world must count for much. I am successful; I am ambitious; the present is mine; the future may hold for me yet greater things. It is madness indeed to court the temptation to forget that no one creature can be to man or woman the whole world. All this I said, and more; through days and nights, through sleepless hours, I struggled. I am no boy, but a man; no weakling; I have a will of iron; no fool, a man of the world, with mind strong for the work that has made me what I am, and yet I failed. All my strife was in vain, all my worldly knowledge went for naught. My will bent to my heart like a willow wand in a strong hand. I loved you, and I came to you, and by Heaven!" he made one step to her, and caught her in his arms again, "you shall be mine!"

Did Beryl yield now? Well might she bow her spirit to

the masterful passion that in no figure, but literally, defied the whole world for her sake; but mighty was her love as his, and she was strong still to resist.

"I will not yield!" she said. "You can not make me yield!"

She met his eyes with full, unflinching gaze now; it was heart to heart, soul to soul, a terrible strife. Lorraine's very lips were bloodless—he scarcely seemed to breathe. So, for a few moments, then he said very low, very softly:

"For my sake, Beryl, you deny me the right I claim, and will never relinquish? For my sake you cling to a life that wrongs you? Your perfect love would sacrifice all that my love gives you? I will not accept the sacrifice. You shall yield to me yet!"

She had no answer for that. She let him hold her to his heart, and kiss her lips at his will, but again and again she said within her breaking heart: "Sooner will I take with my own hand this most wretched life, than suffer him to call me wife. Oh! Heaven keep me from doing him that last irrevocable wrong!"

Would Vere Lorraine conquer after all?

CHAPTER XVI.

A FRACAS.

As Beryl turned from her lover, both were startled by the sudden sound of loud and angry voices coming from the card-room.

"A quarrel!" said the girl, with a catch in her breath. "Ah, *Mon Dieu!* I hear Justin's voice!"

As they hurriedly crossed the drawing-room, they saw within the card-room a confused group; and one man, Delves, shouting loudly, and evidently partially intoxicated, was struggling with some one who held him; but in the instant this scene presented itself, even as Lorraine's stern voice demanded:

"Gentlemen, what does all this mean?" there was a flash—a sharp, but not loud report—a smothered cry, a louder cry of horror, and Justin Harwood fell back on his couch.

Beryl sprung to her uncle's side. Lorraine snatched the smoking pistol from Delves' grasp, and hurled the man himself senseless into a corner.

There was an instant hubbub of tongues.

“Killed?” “The man was drunk.” “He vowed Harwood cheated him!” and a dozen other exclamations, questions, and explanations, while Lorraine and Beryl bent over the wounded man, the girl white as a sheet. “The man was drunk.” “He vowed Harwood cheated him!” That was what she heard—and heard nothing else.

“Go for a doctor, some one,” said Lorraine, briefly—but Beryl’s grip was on his wrist like a vise.

“No, no!” she said, hoarsely; “let him be carried to his room—I will send for our own doctor—no stranger.”

Lorraine turned to Rowcliffe.

“Help me,” he said, “to carry Harwood to his room. The rest, please leave—and not a word of this precious work. Malleeson, rouse up that drunken fellow, and get him off quietly.”

The wound was near the heart, and might turn out to be dangerous. Perhaps it flashed through Lorraine, as he helped Rowcliffe to bear the insensible man to his chamber, that if the bullet had done its work more thoroughly, the world at large would be none the worse off, and Beryl the better; but he was as gentle as any woman in his handling of the man who had probably earned his reward. But so soon as Harwood was laid on the bed, Lorraine dismissed Rowcliffe, asking him to leave at once, to get the other men away, and to hush up the matter as much as possible.

Then he turned to Beryl, who was already tearing up some linen into bandages.

“Tell me whom to go for, Beryl,” he said, “and I will go at once. Some doctor should be fetched; the wound is dangerous.”

She was rapidly and deftly binding up the wound. Without looking up she answered in a low tone:

“I must go myself. Will you—will you stay for a little while with Justin?”

“*You* go, at this time, Beryl! Impossible! You must let me—”

“Ah! no, no; you do not understand. It would be no use unless I went. Will you get me a cab, and see that all the men are gone?”

Lorraine gave her one look, and without a word quitted the room. Within five minutes he returned, and found

that Beryl had thrown a long cloak over her rich amber robe, and drawn the hood round her face.

"Come," Lorraine said, "there is a cab at the door; I will do what I can to revive Mr. Harwood. You know the road you are going, Beryl?"

"Yes, well. I am quite safe, indeed. You need not fear for me."

"My darling! how can I help it?"

He led her down to the cab and placed her in it; but he did not ask her where he should tell the man to drive. It seemed to him that she did not care for him to know her destination. He only clasped her hand closely in his own for a second, and with a whispered "Heaven keep you, my own!" turned back into the house and re-entered the room, where Justin Harwood still lay senseless.

There were brandy and water and other restoratives by the bedside, and Lorraine tried to restore animation, but in vain. Yet Harwood was not dead; his heart beat, though feebly; but Lorraine's thoughts were with Beryl. For whom had she gone? Why must she go herself?

What terrible mystery was there around the man lying wounded here, and the girl whose fate seemed in some way bound up in his?

As the cab turned from the door, Beryl gave the order:

"Drive to Paradise Street, London Docks, and drive fast. You shall be well paid."

"All right, lady," responded cabby; adding, to himself: "What's up now, I wonder? Here's a rum place for a swell lady to go to, and a rum time o' day, too; and he was a howling swell as put her in the cab."

It was now about three o'clock in the morning, and the streets were clear of traffic, so Beryl's hansom bowled along at a swift pace without interruption. Beryl leaned back in the cab, sick at heart.

"If he should regain consciousness while I am away, and his mind should wander, what might he not say?" she said within herself. This seemed to be the dread that haunted her most, and next came the fear that the *fracas* might get talked about and an inquiry set on foot. "Will those men," she thought, "for their own interests be silent? Delves will be—but the others? Who were there? Rowcliffe, Malleson, Standish. Yes, they will keep their own counsel. Heavens!" she said, clinching her hands

over her heart, "if I could but crush down the horrible wish that the bullet—oh, no, no, *Madonna mia*, save me from such a thought!"

Leadenhall Street, Aldgate, down the Minories, past the old Tower looming black against the bleak sky, past the Mint, down Ratcliffe Highway, and presently cabby pulled up and asked a policeman which was Paradise Street.

"Third turnin' to the right," was the answer, and on went the cab.

In another moment Beryl had thrown back the doors, stopping the cab before St. Eanswythe's clergy-house.

"Wait here," she said as she stepped out, her long robe flung over her arm under her cloak.

How came she to know the way here so accurately? What was it she looked for when she went up to the door, as if she expected to find it? Yes, there it was—a bell marked in plain letters above it "Night Bell." Beryl pulled it vigorously, and heard a deep bell ring, not in the passage, but above. It hung in the priest's sleeping apartment, so that he could be aroused at any time to attend the sick or dying.

Beryl had not to wait more than three minutes before she heard a quick, light step in the passage; the street door was opened, and there stood Mr. Harrington, wearing his cassock, a candle in his hand.

"Who wants me?" he said, and started involuntarily as even the flickering light of the candle showed him a woman richly dressed and far above the class of his parishioners. "Come in," he added, quickly, and Beryl followed him into the sitting-room, where he set down the candle on the table and turned to Beryl. As he did so, she threw back the hood of her cloak, displaying her beautiful mass of red-gold curls, and her pale features all quivering with intense emotion.

"Father," she said—"Father Bernard, don't you know me?"

With an involuntary exclamation he caught up the light and held it so that its rays fell full on her face.

"Great Heaven!" he exclaimed, and almost dropping the candle, clasped both the girl's hands in his own. "Know you! Could I ever forget you? My poor child—oh, my poor child!"

"Hush! hush!" said Beryl, struggling with the sobs

that almost choked her. "Don't speak kindly to me, father. I can't bear it to-night. Oh, forgive me for coming to you, but I want you. I can trust no one else. *He* has been wounded. When he revives from his swoon he will be delirious. I have a cab outside. Will you come with me?"

"Surely I will."

He unlocked a drawer and took out a case of instruments, then caught up his priest's cloak lying on a chair, and broad hat, and quickly put them on, adding:

"But how is this? Wounded! Where and how?"

"Father," said the girl, "I am Beryl Carolan, and he is Justin Harwood."

"Beryl Carolan!"

"Did you never think of that? No; how should you? But *you* would not shrink from me?"

"Heaven forbid, my child!" he said, taking her hand in his again. "Come."

He put out the light and went with her to the cab; and when he had taken his place beside her, Beryl told the cabman to drive back whence he had taken her up—to Hanover Street.

The priest bent down to Beryl as they drove off.

"Who is with—Harwood?" he asked.

"Vere Lorraine."

Mr. Harrington was silent for a moment, then he asked:

"Does he come to the house?"

"Yes, sometimes."

Again a pause; then in a low, pained voice the priest asked:

"Beryl, my child, forgive me. Have you kept your promise to me?"

The girl laid her hand in his.

"Father," she said, steadily, "before Heaven, I have kept it inviolate! Do you believe me?"

"Yes, Beryl."

These two quietly spoken words from him meant more than a volume of asseveration from any other man. He did not release the girl's hand again, but kept it in his own the rest of the way, and Beryl's tortured spirit was strangely comforted.

"I heard of you," she whispered, as they drew near to Hanover Street, "by chance—from Vere Lorraine; and I

was so glad to know you were in the same city with me, though perhaps I might scarcely ever see you. I dared not come to your church. Besides—”

She stopped, and turned away her head.

“Besides what, Beryl?”

“There is no place for me there, father. You don’t know what my life is; it seems all wrong and darkness. Here we are at the house.”

The cab stopped and they got out, Beryl giving the man a sovereign. She opened the door with a latch-key, and led the way straight upstairs to Harwood’s room.

Lorraine turned round from the bedside as the door opened, and inwardly started as he saw Mr. Harrington; but he came forward and held out his hand.

“Mr. Harwood is still insensible,” he said; and Beryl drew a breath of relief.

Mr. Harrington threw off his cloak and went straight to the bed. Beryl stood by, Lorraine drawing back a little.

In a few minutes the priest looked up.

“It is a deep swoon,” he said. “Come back to me shortly, Beryl. Mr. Lorraine, I need not keep you.”

Lorraine understood, and made no offer of further service.

“Then, good-night,” he said, and turned to the door.

Beryl followed him into the lighted passage, closing the door behind her. Then Lorraine drew her within his arms, holding her close to him; and she bowed her head down on his breast, not able now to resist him. She was too shattered and broken to feel anything but ineffable comfort in that strong, loving clasp. She clung to him as to some saving power; and when she tried to thank him for what he had done for her to-night, her voice died in a sob, and the words would not come.

“My darling!” Lorraine said, tenderly, “you have been sorely tried. Let me stay with you a little longer, Beryl?”

But Beryl shook her head.

“Ah, no,” she said; “there is nothing you could do. He would not bear any one about him but Father Bernard or me. We knew him in America.”

Yet she had said that night at the theater that she had known three or four Harringtons, but none of them were clergymen. Was it that this priest knew too much about Justin Harwood, and so Beryl would not own to knowing

him until circumstances compelled the admission? But Lorraine only soothed her gently, and told her that she must let him come to-morrow and see her.

"But I may not be able to leave Justin," she said, evasively.

"You will not make that an excuse, Beryl? Dearest, you must not try me so; you must let me see you."

How could she refuse him after that appeal?

"Forgive me," she whispered, lifting her face to his. "Come to-morrow. I will see you."

He pressed his lips to hers in a long, clinging kiss, and then reluctantly released her and went out.

"Oh," said the girl, raising her clasped hands above her head, with an action of utter despair, "if I could tear out my heart and trample out its life beneath my feet I would do it! Why must I live, while thousands less wretched than I am die every hour? Death would be so welcome to me—so welcome! but it passes me by. Others sleep, and I live—live in torture!"

Her arms fell to her side; she stood trembling, the drops gathering on her brow; then with a sudden effort she roused herself, and groping blindly, like one whose eyes were dazed, or whose senses reeled, turned back to Justin Harwood's room.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT DID HARWOOD MEAN?

It was nearly an hour before Mr. Harrington succeeded in restoring Justin Harwood to consciousness, and then the man stared at him in a dazed manner, and half muttered an execration.

He seemed in a good deal of pain; but the priest told Beryl he thought there was no danger; only Harwood had narrowly escaped with his life.

"To-morrow," he said, "I may be able to extract the ball, meanwhile he must be kept as calm and quiet as possible. I will write you a prescription, which you must have made up; there is no immediate hurry."

"How's this? Who floored me, eh?" muttered Harwood, moving his head from side to side. "You pass—eh?—euchred, by all that's— What? who says I cheat?"

I?—what's my name? Ha! ha! ha! I've got so many—so many!"

He went off into inarticulate murmurs. Beryl drew the priest to a writing-table that stood at the further end of the room, and he sat down and wrote the prescription. Beryl stood waiting. When he had finished, Mr. Harrington looked up into the girl's white face.

"Sit down here," he said, gently, drawing forward a low chair near the table. "I want to say a few words to you, my child."

Beryl winced, but obeyed him.

"Are you," said the priest, "going to nurse this man unaided?"

"I must," she answered. "I dare not let any one else come near him. You heard what he said just now; he might say far worse things than that. I shall tell the servants he was taken suddenly ill. They must not know what has happened."

"And the man who shot him—you can depend upon him?"

"It will go hard with him if *he* talks," said Beryl, grimly. "Though he was not sober at the time."

"Harwood had made him drink?"

"Of course he had. I was not in the room, or it never would have happened. Justin only meant to daze him a little, and Delves could not have been more than very much excited to have discovered he was being cheated."

"Harwood was cheating him?"

"I dare say he was. He mostly gains by skill. He plays games that demand great skill, and he depends chiefly on that. But he cheats sometimes; only he is so clever at it that it would take a fellow-Corinthian to find him out. Delves may have fancied the play wasn't fair, or Justin thought Delves more a *blanc bec* than he was, and so was careless."

The priest sat silent for a few moments. It seemed as if he was too deeply troubled for speech. Then he said, slowly:

"And there is no escape for you, Beryl, from this life?"

"None," she said, steadily, not looking at her companion; "if I left Justin you know what would happen?"

"You would at least be free from guilt, Beryl."

She clinched her hands together as they lay on her knee.

"Father," she said, "you don't know all. I couldn't leave Justin; and if I did, things would be a thousand times worse."

"That would be on his conscience, my child; yours would be free."

"But, father," the girl said, "don't you think one may sometimes, 'to do a great right, do a little wrong,' injure one's own conscience to save others from intolerable shame and misery?"

"That is a dangerous doctrine, Beryl," said the priest, sadly. "But I will say no more now. I must be leaving you, for I have to take the six-o'clock service this morning; but I will come again in the course of the day."

Beryl's violet eyes were blind with tears; she took the priest's hand and kissed it reverently.

"Father," she whispered, "I don't deserve your goodness."

"Hush, my child!" He laid his hand on the bended head, and said, softly: "Heaven bless thee, child, and guard thee from all evil!"

And then, with one last look at the wounded man, he went out.

"What is he?" muttered Harwood, in his restless wanderings. "Who did you say? *Père Felix*? No—no—he was a big fellow! A Holy Joe of some sort, anyhow. Where's the girl—yes, it's all right. Here's the der-ringer—a bullet through your heart, my man, or—"

With a convulsive shudder, Beryl laid her cool hand on the sick man's forehead, and he stopped for a moment. The girl's lips were white and quivering with agony.

What was Harwood talking about in his delirium?

CHAPTER XVIII.

DELVES AND CO. IN CONFERENCE.

AT four o'clock on the day of which the small hours had witnessed the *fracas* in Harwood's *salon*, a quartet was assembled in young Delves' chambers. Delves himself lay in bed, mentally recovered, but feeling bodily weak from the effect of his treatment at the strong hands of Vere Lorraine; his memory of what had happened was by no means clear when he woke and found Rowcliffe sitting by

his bedside. That individual had mounted guard in an arm-chair, while Delves slumbered, thinking it not prudent to leave the young man in charge of his valet. No saying what Delves might "let out" in dreams or when half awake. About half past three Malleson and Standish came round to see "how the land lay;" but Rowcliffe kept them waiting until Delves was awake, and then admitted them to the apartment. So here they all were, Rowcliffe sitting on the edge of the bed, smoking a cigarette, Malleson in an arm-chair, and Standish leaning against a chest of drawers.

"I just want to know what it's all about," said Delves, looking from one to the other. "I was playing with Harwood, and he—he rooked me, eh? And what did I do?"

"You were three parts tight, to begin with," said Rowcliffe, "and probably didn't know what was going on. I don't suppose Harwood did rook you; at any rate, you'll have to hold your tongue, for your own sake, as well as Beryl Carolan's. You pulled out a pistol and shot Harwood."

"No!" cried Delves, starting up, "I didn't—"

"You didn't kill him, no! I called round this morning and saw Miss Carolan. She says the wound is not dangerous; the tale is that Harwood was taken suddenly ill; no one knows anything but we four, Miss Carolan, and Vere Lorraine."

"Thank Heaven!" said Delves, sinking back.

"You've good cause to say that, my man. If Harwood had been killed, it wouldn't be easy to hush the matter up. Vere Lorraine has your pistol; it was he who sent you flying into the corner."

"Was it? Yes—yes, I seem to remember now; but you won't blab this, you fellows, will you?"

"Don't you frighten!" said Malleson; "we've more than one reason for holding our tongues. The report of such a *fracas*, and for such a reason, would smash up the *salon*, and banish *la belle* Carolan from these shores. Hold your tongue—you'll do that, I'll warrant—and ours are safe. But you'll have to keep away from Hanover Street for some time to come."

"What apology can I make to Miss Carolan? How will she ever forgive me?" exclaimed poor Delves.

"She gave me a message to you," said Rowcliffe. "I

was to tell you that she knew when you came to yourself you would regret your conduct. She was perfectly aware you were not sober at the time, and so could hardly be held responsible for what you did. She seemed to think Harwood was not free from blame, for she added that he ought not to have let you drink so much."

"She is an angel!" said Delves, turning aside his face. "I don't deserve she should send me such a message. But, Rowcliffe, that was it. I got mad at losing so much. I lost all the time, and I drank recklessly, till I was ripe for any mischief; and then I thought I caught Harwood cheating. I might be wrong, I can't remember that clearly, and I charged him with it. He answered roughly; told me I didn't know what I was about; and then it was, I suppose, I whipped out the pistol. I don't know now whether I fired deliberately or not; it's all a muddle; but I was in a blind rage; and it's no fault of mine, it seems, that I wasn't a murderer."

"But what the dickens were you about with a loaded pistol?" asked Malleson, after a pause; "that's what I want to know; we're not in California."

"I had been practicing in the evening with some fellows at a shooting-gallery," said Delves, "and I remember discharging one barrel; then Charlie Welby came in, and we got talking, and I pocketed the pistol, and forgot all about the other barrel. I don't believe I remembered when I pulled out the pistol at Harwood's that it was loaded."

"Don't suppose you did," said Malleson, dryly; "but I'd be more careful if I were you. Carrying loaded pistols, even on half-cock, is rather a risky kind of practice."

"Well, I've had a good fright this time," returned Delves, sighing; "it'll last me my life, I expect. I might have killed any one," he added, shuddering. "I can't bear to think of it!"

Men are not much given to moralizing to each other, so Delves' companions said nothing; besides, they sympathized with the young fellow, who was placed in a very painful position, and had so narrowly escaped taking a man's life for an offense which, even if committed, would not warrant bloodshed.

Rowcliffe rose.

"Well," he said, "you're all right again now, old fellow, eh?—except feeling a bit crumpled up from the crop-

per Lorraine gave you. No danger of your letting out anything?"

"No, none. Thanks, Rowcliffe, for staying with me. I shall be quite myself in a few hours. By Jove! Lorraine must have sent me flying. I feel bruised all over."

They all laughed.

"It was as fine a fling as I ever saw," said Rowcliffe. "Rather you than me, that's all."

"Maybe Lorraine wouldn't care to have it known he was at Harwood's," observed Standish.

Rowcliffe opened his eyes.

"Why in the world should he care? These common-law men are some of the fastest fellows out; and Lorraine isn't married."

"But I've heard some *on dits* about him and Miss Roden."

"*On dits* don't go for much; and Lorraine wouldn't be foolish enough to think he could keep his going to Harwood's a secret from Miss Roden; so he evidently doesn't care. Why, he was at the theater with Beryl Carolan a week or two ago, and the Rodens in an opposite box."

"Whew! I wonder what Mamma Roden said to that?" said Standish. "She wants the match."

"And would wink at a good deal," added Rowcliffe. "Lorraine's too crack a match every way. Come, now; we'll leave this young man to get some more rest. I'll look in again to-morrow, chappie, and see how you're going on."

"Thanks. I shall be awfully glad to see you."

Delves shook hands with the young men, and they went out, leaving him to reflections which were very far from being all pleasant.

"Say, Malleeson," observed Standish, as the trio walked down the street, "I wonder if Harwood always does play fair, eh?"

Malleeson shrugged his shoulders.

"H'm! don't know. I'd be sorry to back a man for downright honesty who's so confoundedly skillful as Harwood is."

"And who has been in the States," added Rowcliffe. "Harwood's not a bad fellow, in his way; but there's something about him I don't take to."

And to this the other agreed.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PHANTOM AGAIN.

IN the dusk of the evening, Vere Lorraine sat alone in his chambers. He had sent his clerks home; there was no need for them to stay longer—there was no need for him to stay. He had told Beryl he would see her to-day. Had the fire in his heart cooled within a few hours, that he lingered here when he might have been by Beryl's side? Nay; Vere Lorraine scarcely loved in such fashion, or he would have listened to the counsels of his worldly wisdom, instead of flinging it all to the winds, as he had done sixteen hours ago.

It was no thought of prudence now that made him a laggard lover, no harking back upon scruples crushed once and forever. It was the phantom that often haunted him, and now stood beside him in the gloaming—not a definable shape, but a presence that escaped when he tried to define it, but grew clearer when he sought to dismiss it.

Why had that phantom come back to him to-day? Was it in warning or in menace? Again and again he had said, "It was a dream, a sick man's fancy;" and he had grown to almost believe this. And now, to-day, even amid his work, the old horrible doubt returned, and he could not exorcise the specter.

He sat gazing into the coals, glowing with a dull-red glow, and step by step he went back, as he had done "full many a time and oft" already, through the years; and ever as he came to the time he would to-night have given all he possessed to recall distinctly, a cloud veiled and obscured his memory, like the cloud that veiled the sight of poor Rose Mary as she gazed into the beryl stone. There were faces he could not define, words he could not distinctly hear.

Oh, for one moment—for only one moment—of full, clear memory!

"Why must I endure this torture?" he said in his heart. "Let the dead bury its dead?"

He rose suddenly, flung on his ulster and hat, and three minutes later was in a hansom, *en route* for Hanover Street.

"Miss Carolan, sir?" said the footman, of whom he asked if he could see Beryl. "I'll see if she can leave Mr. Harwood. He seems getting on a bit, sir; but he's very ill, out of his head, and Miss Carolan hasn't left him a minute."

"Has not the doctor been to see him again?" asked Lorraine.

"I fancy the doctor's with him now, sir—a clergyman he is. Will you walk in here, please, sir? and I'll go up and tell Miss Carolan."

He opened the door of the morning-room, and Lorraine paced up and down for nearly five minutes in by no means a patient mood. Then a hand was laid on the door; it opened, and Beryl entered the room.

Lorraine turned to her, opening his arms, and the girl did not resist the appeal. She threw herself on to his breast, and for some moments he held her to him in silence; then Beryl tried to draw herself away.

"I can not stay long," she said, hurriedly. "I could only leave Justin at all because Mr. Harrington is with him, and he must go soon."

But Lorraine would not release her. He drew her to a couch and made her sit down by him, still keeping his arms round her. And how could Beryl strive with him? She was so brain-weary, so heart-sick! Only she could know what it was to stand by the bedside of Justin Harwood, and hear his ravings. For her

"'Twas something like the burst from death to life,
From the grave's cerements to the robes of heaven,"

to be with Vere Lorraine, sheltered by his clasp, resting on his heart.

"Why do you tempt me?" she whispered, at last. "I ought not to have seen you; but you made me promise—"

"And you had to keep your word? Was that all, Beryl?" looking down into the deep-blue eyes which had always such an expression of pain and suffering.

"Ah, no! you know that was not all. Would it had been! then I should be stronger."

"Not that wish, dearest," said Lorraine, softly; "not the wish that you did not love me, or loved me less."

"The wish was for your sake," Beryl said, hiding her face against him. "But I can not say now all that is in my

heart. I have such a little time that I can stay with you, and I feel too broken just now to speak as I ought. When I can leave Justin I will see you once again, and then—”

“Once again,” he said; “and then forever” rushed to his lips, but never passed them. The phantom rose up before him, black and grim, and the words froze on his tongue. He turned deathly white, and in silence strained the slight form he held passionately to him, and it was some moments before either of them spoke: then Beryl, trying instinctively, perhaps, to lead a way to that which least occupied her thoughts, spoke of Justin Harwood.

“Mr. Harrington says he will not be long ill,” she said. “He got out the bullet an hour ago.”

“And is Mr. Harwood delirious?”

“Yes—now; not violent. He lies and talks incessantly.”

“My poor Beryl! that you should be forced to hear such ravings as his!”

Beryl started, and looked up into her lover’s face with a flash of actual fear in her own.

“What do you know of him?” she said, quick and low.

“That he is a villain, I know,” Lorraine answered, quietly, “or he would not have placed you in your present position. That alone would be enough to prove his past record no spotless page. A man does not come all at once to such infamy. But his face, everything about him, tell a tale to me of an evil, reckless life.”

“‘An evil, reckless life’ indeed,” repeated Beryl, slowly. But did Vere Lorraine know how evil? “And you are speaking,” she added, “of my uncle—”

She paused.

Lorraine, filling up the hiatus, bent down to her.

“Is he your uncle, Beryl?” he said. “You call him so, though you speak to him and of him by his Christian name only. I can not believe that there is any kinship between that villain and you.”

Beryl’s eyes drooped. She held her breath for a moment before she asked:

“Is that your only reason for doubting the relationship?”

“That is a question, Beryl—not an answer. Tell me the truth; is this man your uncle?”

Beryl lifted her head, and looked straight into her lover's dark eyes.

"No," she said; "he is my step-father."

"Thank Heaven!"

Lorraine folded the girl to him again.

"No blood of his runs in your veins—I knew it could not be. But why the deception, Beryl?"

"Why?" echoed the girl, bitterly; "ask a thousand 'whys,' not one; why are the names we bear not our own? Why do we live this horrible existence?—horrible, at least, to me—not to him. Why is our life a sham—why?—why? Don't stop at one question."

"I will not," said Lorraine, "I will ask a hundred—ay, a thousand, if you will answer them."

"But I can not do that. I can tell you one thing—that my Christian names are my own, not the other. I can not—dare not—must not tell you any more than that; and now, let me go; I must return to Justin."

Lorraine released her, and both rose; but there was a curious settling about the lines of his handsome mouth that Beryl could not quite read. Did he mean to try and compel her confidence, or to hold to his purpose of making her his wife? Hardly the last, after what she had just told him. He had naturally supposed that if she yielded to him it would be without reserve; that she would tell him all the truth about herself; but a man can not place his name and honor in the keeping of a woman who admits to him that the very name she bears is not her own, and that she "dare not—must not" tell him who and what she is, and what her life has been.

"Good-bye," Beryl said, making a step toward the door.

Lorraine took her hands in his, and drawing her to him, folded her to his heart once more.

"Not good-bye," he said, pressing his lips to hers; "I shall see you soon again, Beryl—very soon. Tell me when I may come."

Beryl raised her eyes in mute appeal, but the look she met assured her that resistance would be useless. Lorraine would take no denial.

"I can not tell yet," she said, "when I shall be able to leave Justin. Will you let me write to you?"

"My own love, yes; but you will promise me to write as soon as you can?"

“Yes.”

He held her to him a little longer, and then let her go, and Beryl went back to Justin Harwood's bedside.

Mr. Harrington was obliged to go now, and the girl was alone with Harwood.

“A fine bird to pluck!” muttered the sick man. “He doesn't care for the play, it's for her he comes, and never cares whether he wins or loses; and she wants to send him away. What for?—what for? That's what I want to know. Yes, yes—that's the ticket, pal, climb up this way. Eh? tread softly; you'll be heard—eh? you hear a step?—Levant's the word! Handsome, you bet—a regular swell—worth something, I tell you, into the bargain! Why, his rings alone—that's a real rose-diamond, and no mistake. Don't be a fool, girl! what'll *he* know about it? Find it out, will he? A bullet will soon settle that.”

And so on, till at length the sleeping-draught administered by the priest took effect, and Justin Harwood slept.

But Beryl Carolan sat wakeful and watchful through the long hours of the night. For her there was no sleep—no rest!

CHAPTER XX.

DOES HE LOVE HER?

“YES, Enid, you look just perfect!” said May, surveying her sister; “and am *I* all right?”

Both girls were dressed for a small dinner-party at home, the invited guests being Emilie Gresham, Vere Lorraine, Hazlemere, and Mr. Harrington; the latter of whom was only able to come because a young clergyman staying with him for a few days would take evensong for him.

Enid was dressed in pale pink, May in cream; and both had taken extraordinary pains with their toilets—not a bit more than usual, if they were to be believed; but the maids, putting their heads together, said they had never known either Miss Enid or Miss May so particular about their flowers and their jewels; so anxious as to the fall of their draperies; so generally solicitous to appear to the best advantage.

“As for Miss Enid, I can understand,” said that young lady's abigail. “It's just because Mr. Lorraine's coming

she's so mighty hard to please; but Miss May—it can't be Mr. Lorraine; is it the painter, do you think?"

"Most likely," replied May's tirewoman. "He's very nice-looking, and if I was Mrs. Roden, I wouldn't have let Miss May go to him to have her portrait took. People are apt to fall in love under those *circumstances*."

So now Enid and her sister were doing the mutual-admiration business; but certainly each deserved the praise of the other.

"Yes, you'll do; you couldn't look nicer, dear," said Enid, ignoring any special desire on May's part to fascinate; perhaps she feared a *tu quoque*. "Are you ready? Shall we go down?"

"Yes," replied May, looking critically over her shoulder into the pier-glass, and giving a few feminine twitches to her skirts. "That's right—come along."

They ran down to the drawing-room, and in a few minutes Mr. Hazlemere was announced; next came Mrs. Gresham; and while Enid was talking to her, and pretending she was not watching the door, it opened once more, and the girl changed color as she caught sight of Lorraine's tall figure.

Poor Enid! how her heart beat when Vere came up to her, and, instead of turning away after greeting her, took a vacant place beside her, and began to talk to her.

"Do you know, Miss Roden," he said, smiling, "I am promising myself a treat to-night. Emmie told me the other day that you sung a new song down at St. Eanswythe's which brought the house down, and I want to hear it."

"Oh, Mr. Lorraine," cried Enid, "I shall think you are laughing at me! As if you would care for a song that delighted the audience in Paradise Street. I don't think you care much for songs at all?"

"I don't generally; but I like to hear you sing," he answered; "and Emmie said the song was really good. I hope you don't really think I would laugh at you?"

"I don't know," said the girl, archly. "You might."

"A lawyer's word, I suppose, goes for nothing?"

"Not for much," interposed Emilie. And to herself she said: "How right George Eliot is when she says that sympathetic people seem to mean so much more than they do mean! Vere hasn't the slightest idea of the mischief

he is doing when he talks to Enid as he is doing now. She felicitates herself over his remembering my mention of a song, whereas it is only that he notices everything and forgets nothing, and would have said the same thing to May or to any one else. The girl fancies he's getting to like her; and I'm afraid, if he's in love at all, it is with Beryl Carolan."

The entrance of Mr. Harrington created a diversion, and a few minutes later dinner was announced, and the party filed down into the dining-room.

Lorraine was seated next to Enid, and, as sometimes he spoke apart to her, the priest covertly watched them, as he had done that Sunday at the clergy-house; he saw the soft light in the girl's eyes—the pretty color creeping into her cheek now and then—and he thought: "Vere Lorraine is no flirt. Does he find the girl more than a pleasant companion, or is it entirely on her side?"

Presently something was said about a new play which had been produced the previous night, and which the Rodens had been to see.

"What is it about, Mr. Roden?" Hazlemere asked. "I couldn't go, and I forgot to look for a notice of it."

"Oh! you must ask the girls," replied Mr. Roden. "I never can make head or tail of a play."

"A melodrama, I fancy," said Lorraine. "I was too busy last night to go. Miss Roden, will you enlighten our ignorance? Mr. Harrington is particularly anxious to know all about it."

The priest laughed.

"I dare say," he said, "I shall prefer hearing about it from Miss Roden to seeing it."

"I hope your reverence means a compliment?" said Lorraine.

"I am sorry there should be any doubt upon that point," said Mr. Harrington. "You see, I have not your experience, Mr. Lorraine."

"You evidently don't need it," retorted the other, with exceeding gravity, and the laugh went round, the priest joining in it.

"And now for the play," said Lorraine, turning to Enid; "was it blood-curdling?"

"Oh! I don't know," said she. "It was a very confused story, as is always the case in these pieces with a lot

of people in them. The hero is turned out from his home; he is heir to a large property, and runs away to sea; he gets cast away on a sort of pirate's island."

"And the heroine is the chief pirate's daughter," interposed May.

"Yes. Well," Enid went on, "by and by the hero, Hugh Walrond, discovers a hidden treasure on the island; the pirate chief comes upon him just when he has put the treasure back in the hole—"

"And the pirate," put in May, taking up the tale again, cries: 'What hast thou hidden here, Englishman?' he's a Greek pirate, you know. Walrond says nothing, and then the pirate threatens to shoot him—"

May went on, but Lorraine did not hear anything but a humming round him for the next two minutes; those ordinary words seemed to crash into his heart as if they had been a bullet, and not merely talk about a bullet. He saw, not the faces round him, but a room, a sort of cabin, and a man roughly clothed, holding a pistol, with a threatening gesture; and he knew that what he saw was not merely a vision—how should it be? Yet he could not define it as a memory.

The change in his face was too brief and too slight to be noticed by any one at the table but Bernard Harrington; and he saw, and watched covertly and very keenly, the handsome features of the man opposite to him.

"Of course," were the next words Lorraine caught—May was still speaking—"the pirate wanted the treasure, and Walrond pretends there is none. 'Show me the way to the treasure thou hast hidden,' cries the pirate, 'or take a bullet in thy heart!'"

"What melo-dramatic stuff!" cried Hazlemere.

"Yes, go on; what next?" asked Emilie, laughing; but Lorraine said not a word; his teeth were set close; his heart was beating in slow, heavy throbs.

"Take a bullet in thy heart!" Where had he heard those words, or words like them? Who had said them? Were they to him, or to some one else? Had he dreamed he heard them, or was it an actual experience? He roused himself with one of those terrible efforts that cause even physical pain as well as mental agony, and said to Enid, with a half smile.

"I am glad I did not waste an evening over such a piece. You must have been bored to extinction."

"It was lucky, then," replied Enid, half archly, "that mamma did not, as she originally intended doing, ask you to join us."

"Ah!" said Lorraine, quickly, "I should not have been bored in that case; but, unluckily for me, briefs would have robbed me of the pleasure in any case."

"Mamma thought you had an engagement for last night," said Enid, taking the compliment, with the egotism of love, especially to herself.

"In the Temple—nowhere else," said he.

Here Mrs. Roden gave the signal for adjournment, and the ladies rose and sailed out to the drawing-room; while Lorraine, Mr. Harrington, and Hazlemere tried not to be bored by their host, but were bored nevertheless. All three were very abstemious wine-drinkers, whereas Mr. Roden drank four or five glasses, and prosed heavily, as if he were in the House of Commons, over subjects which nobody else cared about; while Lorraine would have been glad of an opportunity of talking with Mr. Harrington, and Hazlemere was fretting and fuming to be by May's side.

At length, however, there was an adjournment to the drawing-room, and Lorraine presently asked Enid for the new song, and while she sung, he stood by and turned her pages for her; and she was in Paradise, while he all the time was thinking of Beryl Carolan.

Mr. Harrington sat down by Mrs. Roden's side.

"What a treat it is," he said, "to hear in a drawing-room such really cultivated singing as Miss Roden's!"

"Enid is flattered by your approval," said the well-pleased mother, "for Mrs. Gresham tells me you are so musical, and Mr. Lorraine is a most severe critic; yet he likes Enid's singing."

The priest smiled. He could do a bit of diplomacy, like most ecclesiastics, and he was doing it now.

"But is Mr. Lorraine's usually correct judgment entirely unbiased in this case?" he asked, mildly. "Not that I mean to imply that Miss Roden's singing—"

Mrs. Roden laughed, and her eyes sparkled.

"Oh, I understand you perfectly, Mr. Harrington," she said. "I don't think Mr. Lorraine is a man to let his

judgment be warped by anything; besides, he always admired Enid's singing from the first day we knew him. But I think, I hope—"

She paused.

"Yes?" said Mr. Harrington, gently.

"Well, I hope what you seem to think is the case may prove to be so. There is no man to whom we would so gladly give Enid. Lorraine is a man of great gifts, and a noble-hearted, singularly unselfish man as well."

The priest glanced toward the piano. Enid's song had just ceased; Lorraine was bending down, saying something to her—some compliment on her singing, no doubt; and she, with her eyes bent down and her fingers wandering lightly over the keys, was listening to the musical voice that was wont to charm far harder hearts than hers, and drinking in sweet poison. Was the picture a painful one to the man who silently watched it? Self-command was too much a habit with him for any betrayal of his thoughts or feelings, whatever they were. He replied to Mrs. Roden:

"Yes, in these days one does not often meet with so fine a type of character as Lorraine's."

The mother smiled again, looking across to Enid and Lorraine. The latter had moved now, and was talking to Emilie Gresham; then Enid and May went to sing a duet, and Emilie to play for them, and Lorraine sat down at a little table not far from the piano, and began idly turning over the leaves of a photograph album. Mr. Harrington rose and crossed the room to the table, and Lorraine, looking up and seeing him, instantly rose and placed a chair for him.

"Thanks," said the other, sitting down; and then he saw that the photograph before Lorraine was one of Enid. It was at this, then, he had been gazing dreamily for the last minute or two! How easy it is for even the keen-sighted men and women to read things backward! Lorraine, in truth, had opened at this portrait by chance; he had forgotten the next second who it represented. He was not looking at it at all; nor was he listening to the song at the piano; his mind was dwelling on those words he had heard at the dinner-table, and on Beryl. Was she ever, indeed, for one moment absent from his thoughts?

"Photographs?" added Mr. Harrington. "Ah! Miss Roden—a very good likeness."

"Very good," assented Lorraine, looking at it for the first time attentively. Then he turned the page, and the next photograph was one of a Mexican *hacienda*, which Lorraine himself had given to Enid.

"How came that here?" asked Mr. Harrington.

"A place where I lived for a week a few years ago, not far from Santa Fé," Lorraine explained; "and very welcome the old don and his family made me."

"You have traveled in some strange, wild places, Mr. Lorraine?"

"Yes; but I shunned the cold countries. I spent part of a winter in St. Petersburg once; but I have never wished to repeat the experiment."

"Well, I confess I don't care for the cold. I have passed, too, most of my foreign life in warm climates—India and Australia."

There was just the slightest pause before Lorraine said:

"I must have seen you in Australia, I think."

"In Sydney, perhaps, as I said before."

Lorraine shook his head.

"No," he said, slowly. "I have thought over that; but if I had seen you clearly, I should have known you again. Were you ever stationed up country—at a place called Barra Creek—about sixty miles from Sydney?"

"No," said the priest; "never. Why?"

"I might have seen you there, that's all," returned Lorraine; "but I don't think the place was more than a few shanties—I hardly knew it."

"Then you only passed through it?"

"No; I was there some three weeks; but I was ill—wounded, and out of my head nearly the whole time, so I couldn't very well explore the neighborhood. But forgive me, I don't care to talk about that time—my memories of it are vague and confused, and they are all painful."

"Forgive me, Mr. Lorraine; I am sorry I mentioned the subject."

"It was I who broached it, not you, Mr. Harrington; and in any case there would be nothing to forgive. How well Enid's voice blends with her sister's?"

"Yes, they both sing very charmingly."

Lorraine had called Miss Roden by her Christian name, and had not corrected himself; the latter he would hardly do; if he had made a slip of the tongue, worldly wisdom would counsel him to let the slip pass; but it might merely be that, as he was accustomed to hear his cousin, Mrs. Gresham, talk of "Enid," the name came naturally to his lips.

We seldom speak of people as we speak to them; a lady mentions her male acquaintances by their surnames only, but never omits the titular prefix in addressing them; men talk of "Mary So-and-So;" but would not call the lady in question Mary to her face. And, Mr. Harrington further reflected, Vere Lorraine was not a man likely to betray himself, unless under the influence of very great excitement, so that "Enid" probably meant nothing; and when the girl left the piano, Lorraine did not seek her; he let her sit down by Emmie's side, and either did not notice, or ignored the shade of disappointment on her brow.

"How is it?" the priest mused. "Is he fond of Enid Roden, or is he only seeking her in a kind of recoil, being in love with Beryl, but naturally shrinking from offering her marriage? Shall I question Beryl? Yet Lorraine has not been to the house for more than a week. Is that his doing, or Beryl's?"

But by and by Lorraine went and sat down by Enid, and the girl's face brightened, and a soft smile hovered on her lips; and yet while Lorraine was unconsciously making Enid happy, he was saying in his heart:

"A whole week and not a word from Beryl? But I promised to wait, and I must keep my word. If she would only write to me!"

The evening came to a close, and the guests took their leave, Hazlemere in the seventh heaven, for had not May been most kind to him? and Lorraine feeling relieved; he was hardly in a mood just now to have any genuine pleasure in society, and yet he sought it as a distraction.

When he returned to his chambers in Albemarle Street, after escorting Emilie Gresham home, he looked quickly among the letters awaiting him, to see if there was one from Beryl; and suddenly his heart leaped up with a passionate throb as he caught up one of the letters and pressed it to his lips.

"At last!" he muttered, "at last!"

Yet the letter itself might have been written to any ordinary friend, or even to make a mere business appointment.

“DEAR MR. LORRAINE,—I shall be able to see you any time to-morrow evening, or any other evening this week.

“Faithfully yours,

“LILIAN BERYL CAROLAN.”

“Why do you write to me so coldly, Beryl?” the man whispered, covering his face. “Oh, can I ever wish that I had never known you? No!—in all the agony that I endure, to love her, to know that her love is mine, is happiness I would not yield to purchase years of peace! She is mine—she shall be one day all my own!”

And Enid and May Roden, in dressing-gowns and slippers, were reveling in the warmth of Enid’s dressing-room fire, and enjoying what young ladies term a “jabber.”

Enid was disposed to be dreamy; but May’s high spirits inclined her to express her happiness in a more objective form, and she laughed and “chaffed” Enid a good deal about Lorraine; Enid not minding the said “chaff”—in fact, she liked it.

“Fancy his remembering that song, you know—and asking for it!” said May; “and he’s nothing of a song-lover, which makes it the more suspicious!”

“Nonsense, May!” returned Enid, coloring. “I should think you were too busy chattering to Mr. Hazlemere to notice what Lorraine said or did.”

“Ah! the *tu quoque* won’t do, you know!” exclaimed May, coloring in her turn. “I don’t let many things escape me, and certainly not what Lorraine says or does. You needn’t be jealous; and as to Hazlemere, I didn’t talk much to him.”

“He did to you, then—so it is much the same thing, May.”

“Oh, Enid!—absurd!”

“It’s not absurd!” persisted Enid. “I am sure he likes you very much, May.”

“Not a bit!” protested May, the color of a rose; “and you know it would be no good if he did.”

“You are not mercenary, May!” said Enid, gravely. “Money does not make happiness, does it?”

“It’s a very jolly thing!” said May, with a worldly

manner that would not have deceived the most innocent creature living.

Enid laughed.

"Very well," she said; "you have plenty—"

"Oh, Enid!" cried May, springing up, "you run on too fast! I shall go to bed. Good-night, and pleasant dreams of—of somebody!"

"The same to you!" retorted Enid; and May fled to her own apartment.

Enid sat still, musing.

"I wonder if he does like me?" ran her thoughts; "or if— No—he can't care for Beryl Carolan! I don't believe he does; she is so—so—"

She paused.

So what? Only a little while ago Enid Roden was ready to hurl defiance at any one who traduced her dear Beryl. But jealousy makes terrible havoc with love and with justice.

CHAPTER XXI.

HERBERT GRESHAM'S GOOD ANGEL.

WHILE Justin Harwood lay wounded, the "evenings" in Hanover Street were of course suspended and there was wailing and gnashing of teeth among the exiles; for Beryl also was invisible, being in close attendance on the invalid.

"I can't stand it any longer," said Gresham one morning to Rowcliffe, who was breakfasting with him, the hour 11.30. "I shall go to-day and try to see Miss Carolan."

"You think she'll make an exception in your favor, eh?" asked the other, with just a suspicion of a sneer.

Gresham flushed slightly.

"Not as you imply," he said, after a pause. "She has made me understand that clearly enough, by Jove! but I worship her all the same!"

"Of course. Think you'll make her change her mind?"

"No, Rowcliffe; I'm not so foolish, and, bad as I am, I don't think I'd even try."

Rowcliffe looked at the speaker, and said no more on that subject, but his next remark was *à propos*:

"I tell you what, Gresham, I don't believe there's a nobler woman breathing than Beryl Carolan. Think what her temptations are! and yet she steers clear!"

"Ay!" said Gresham, quickly; then his brow clouded; "but that diamond robbery, Rowcliffe?" he added, dubiously.

"She was sheltering some one else," said Rowcliffe, decidedly. "I'll never believe her a thief!"

"Nor I; that is—I can't believe it, in spite of very ugly evidence."

"Evidence be hanged!" returned Rowcliffe, unreasonably, as he rose. "Now I must be off, Gresh. See you at the Maple Tree to-night?"

The Maple Tree was a well-known gambling proprietary club in St. James's Place.

"Probably. Ta-ta!"

And Rowcliffe departed.

Gresham looked at his watch. Why not call in the morning? He might have a better chance of seeing Beryl than if he deferred until the afternoon, when there might be other callers—if she was seeing people at all.

So he rose, dressed himself with scrupulous care, and walked off to Hanover Street, where he was told that Mr. Harwood was much better, and was shown into the drawing-room.

It may be mentioned that the witnesses of the *fracas* in the *salon* had religiously kept their secret, and that Herbert Gresham openly supposed Harwood's illness to be "a seizure of some kind."

He had not long to wait. In a few minutes the door opened and Beryl came in. She was dressed in a long black velvet robe, with a little ruff round the throat edged with pearls, and she looked, thus attired, Gresham thought, more beautiful than ever; or was it that each time he saw her he imagined he had never yet fully appreciated her loveliness?

She came forward with a smile to meet her visitor, holding out her hand, and Gresham stammered out something, he scarcely knew what. Beryl, however, was perfectly self-possessed.

"How kind of you to call!" she said. "Please sit down. Justin is so much better now; he hopes to be in the drawing-room early next week."

She seated herself in a fauteuil near the fire; Gresham took a chair near her.

"Don't call me kind," he said, a little huskily. "I

ought to ask you to forgive me for troubling you with my presence; I couldn't help coming."

"And I am pleased to see you," Beryl said, quietly. "There is no reason why you and I should not be very good friends, Mr. Gresham, is there?"

She looked straight into his face as she said this, with a clear, penetrating, unclouded gaze, which he met, fascinated and bewildered. What did she mean? She knew it was not friendship he felt for her; she had already made him pretty plainly understand that she would regard any deeper homage from him than ordinary *galanterie* allowed, as an insult. He could not understand Beryl Carolan; she was not in the least like any woman he had met before. What other woman would—nay, could dare do—coolly ignore what amounted to a confession of love from a man who could not offer honorable love—and, looking him in the face without a change of color in her own, talk to him of "friendship?"

"You are puzzled?" she said, after a moment, seeing that he was not likely to break the silence. "No wonder; I suppose I am rather eccentric; and I don't know if you will forgive me for what I am going to say."

"Nothing you can say," said Gresham, eagerly, "could need forgiveness."

"Is that from your heart, or is it merely *façon de parler*?"

"From my heart. How could it be otherwise?"

"Still, I may wound or offend you. I am not going to flatter you, you know."

"If you wound me, it will be because of my own deserts; you can not offend me."

"That is generously spoken, Mr. Gresham. Then, will you let me say first, that though you are not a good man, you are not a thoroughly bad man—not as bad as you believe yourself to be; and that for the good in you—for what you may be yet, though you are not now—I like you, and I want you to be more worthy of yourself."

Gresham's cheeks flushed; he turned aside.

"You like me!" he repeated, with a catch in his breath. "I don't deserve it, Beryl—Miss Carolan."

"Beryl, if you like," the girl said, gently. "I can't measure deserts where I am concerned; but do you say the same with regard to your wife?"

Gresham started so violently that Beryl paused; but Gresham muttered, hurriedly:

“Go on—go on!”

“I have no right to speak to you at all, I know,” she went on, “as I am doing, and perhaps you think anything which may sound like reproach or admonition comes strangely from me—”

“Beryl! no—no!” interrupted Gresham, passionately, and turning to her. “Don’t wrong me by believing I could have such a thought. There is no woman living I honor as I honor you!”

“Thank you,” said the girl, with a momentary quiver of the lip. “But this at least you may think—that I have no right to interfere—”

“Nor that,” said Gresham. “I could not have dreamed—after my presumption, too—that you took sufficient interest in me to care what became of me.”

“Is that the way you look at it? Then I will speak frankly. I don’t ask any confidence, and I have heard nothing concerning you and your wife but general rumor. Yet of this I am sure—that the greatest, if not the entire, blame was yours.”

Gresham writhed as if under the knife, and once more turned away, so that Beryl could not see his face; but she saw his tight-clinched hands and heaving breast—his whole frame quivering. By and by—for Beryl would not break this silence—he rallied somewhat, and said in a hard tone:

“It’s too late now, and I haven’t the will. She no longer cares for me, nor I for her.”

“Nothing that you have just now said is true, Mr. Gresham; it is not too late—your wife loves you as you don’t deserve any woman should love you; and you love her far more than you know.”

Gresham turned his face slowly to the girl.

She met his gaze unflinchingly.

“You have never spoken to Emilie,” he said. “How do you know that she loves me?”

“You know that she does; you are only fencing, Mr. Gresham; and you loved her—once.”

“Yes—once!”

“But not now—your love is mine now, you would say, but you see that is useless, and would be useless if you were free to-morrow. You have almost wrecked your life as it

is; I can't let you quite wreck it, if I can possibly prevent such misery."

"It is quite wrecked," said Gresham, gloomily; "you don't know—I couldn't tell you—"

"And I need no telling," said Beryl. "I have seen the world as few women see it, Mr. Gresham; but it is sheer fatalism for any man to say of his life, while he has health and strength, that it is wholly lost; and of this I am certain, that if you really wished and sought your wife's forgiveness, you would gain it."

Gresham rose up hastily and paced through the room, with flushed cheek and sparkling eyes.

"If!" he repeated—"if! Why should I wish it? The blame was not all mine, Beryl!—it was not!"

"No?" Beryl said, watching him; "did she not bear with you to the uttermost—forgive you again and again?"

Gresham started, and stopped in his excited walk.

"How do you know?" he said. "You told me—"

"That I had only heard rumors. Yes, and the rest I can piece together for myself. I have seen your wife, and heard much of her from Enid Roden, and something from others; and it is an old story, isn't it? A man trampling on a woman's heart, and the woman forgiving until she can forgive no longer?"

"You stab freely!" said Gresham, through his teeth.

"And cruelly wound your masculine vanity," added Beryl, "by refusing to recognize in you any element of the martyr. Well, you have been very forbearing; perhaps I have said too much; I will say no more."

"No, you have not said too much; you have not said half enough!" cried Gresham, throwing himself down beside her. "I deserve every reproach you have uttered, and a thousand more."

Beryl's violet eyes filled with tears; she laid her hand on his.

"Then you *do* wish," she said, softly, "for a better, nobler life?"

"I don't know what I wish!" he said, hoarsely, veiling his eyes with his other hand—"for anything you ask, Beryl."

She did not deprecate those words. The man, she knew, must begin on the lower plane; his very passion for herself had raised him above the ignoble level on which he had

hitherto been content to live; the more when her rejection of his homage as an insult had inspired him with a true reverence for her. That he was capable of this feeling for a woman who had haughtily refused him as a suitor was proof of how much good there was under all the underlying dross of his character.

That he loved her still, Beryl knew, but it was a love chastened by deep respect; yet, it might be contended, she was hardly prudent in allowing him to continue his visits to the house. But Beryl knew herself, and the man with whom she had to deal; she did not fear him, and she did not want to lose her hold over him. She had gained now more than she had dared to hope for, and her cheek flushed, her eyes glowed, as she said, earnestly:

"If my wishes, then, have so much weight with you, will you try, for my sake, to be what I so long to see you? You tell me you honor me; let me be able to honor you."

He did not answer her for a minute or two; his hand clasped hers now, clinging to it, as a man in moral straits clings to a woman, for here the woman is the stronger; and terrible was the struggle within him, for even some measure of self-command. When at length he spoke, his voice was strained and broken.

"How can you trust me, Beryl? I made *her* promises, and broke them again and again, and I loved her then."

"And you love her now," said Beryl, softly; "but in spite of what you have just said, I will trust you—not to be all at once what I know you will be yet—but to try to grieve when you fail. So! you will promise me?"

He dropped his hand from his face, and suddenly kneeling before her, kissed her hand devoutly.

"I do promise," he whispered; "God bless you, Beryl!"

Then he rose, and without another word—indeed, he could not have spoken one—caught up his hat, and went out.

Beryl clasped her hands over her bosom, her lips were parted, and her blue eyes shone with a wonderful light.

"Oh!" she said, under her breath, "if I can save this one man—if I can make this one woman happy again, will it not be some atonement? It will be at least a golden gleam across the black night of my life."

CHAPTER XXII.

A DREAM OR A REALITY?

WHEN Vere Lorraine once more took his way to Hanover Street, his mind was in a strange chaos, tossed up and down between warring elements of doubt and passion, resolved not to part from Beryl Carolan, yet knowing not, if even his doubt as to his own past were set at rest, how he could, in honor, give his name to a woman who refused him her confidence. That her reserve concealed guilt of her own was a thought that never for a moment came to torture him; but all the passionate strength of his love could not make him ignore the fact that a jarring note is struck across the perfect harmony of love between husband and wife when on either side there is a distinct withholding of trust and confidence.

Would Beryl hold to her determination, or could he prevail upon her to yield her standpoint?

Miss Carolan was in her drawing-room, the servant said, and showed Lorraine straight up.

Beryl was seated on a couch near the fire; but she rose up and came forward to meet the visitor with outstretched hand; but the moment the door closed behind the servant, Lorraine folded his arms about the girl, and strained her passionately to his heart. "My darling!" he said, after a few moments, for at first there was not a word spoken between them; "it seems so long since we have been together. Has not the time been dreary to you, too, dearest?"

"Yes," she said, clinging to him; "I wanted you every hour—every minute; but, oh, I wish it was not so with you!"

He knew what she meant, and held her closer to him.

"My own Beryl!" and his lips touched hers; "for my sake, don't say that!"

With a kiss on her lips, she could not answer; the wish died in her throbbing heart—the word was unuttered. She hid her face against him with a quick sob of pain.

Lorraine soothed her tenderly till she had regained her self-command; then she looked up, and said, very low, almost in a whisper:

"Was it cruel to let you come, only to tell you that—that it must be for the last time?"

"It can not—shall not—be for the last time, Beryl," said Lorraine, with strange quietness. "Do you know what such terrible words mean for both of us?"

"Yes, I know," she answered, her lips white and quivering; "but my resolve is made. I say, in no hyperbole, but in awful and literal truth, that I would sooner kill myself than become your wife!"

Lorraine suddenly released her from his arms and walked through the room; the girl, white and trembling, sunk into a chair. Presently her lover paused.

"You will not," he said, "give me your trust? You will tell me nothing of the past?"

"Nothing."

She did not even glance at him, but stared blankly into the fire. Lorraine looked at her for a moment, then he made one step and flung himself at her feet, wrapping her to his breast with passionate force.

"Oh, Beryl, Beryl, how shall I bear it? I can not put you from me—I can not!"

But even that outburst of terrible agony, though it made the girl's heart stand still and her very lips grow livid, did not shake her resolve.

"Vere," she said, when she could speak, "I can never forgive myself that I let you love me. What would be my self-reproach if I let you ruin your life for my sake? I should not know an hour's happiness. I shall always be true to you, Vere; in heart and soul I am yours, and I shall be yours even beyond the grave; but I can never, never be your wife. We must part."

"No, by Heaven!" he said, holding her yet closer to him. "Beryl, you try me too far; I am not an angel, but a man, and I love you!"

A sudden tremor went through the girl's frame. Lorraine felt it, and lifted the face he had bowed on his breast.

"My own darling!" he said, "did you fear me? I worship you too truly to dream of wrong to you. But you must not ask me to put you wholly from me. I must hope—I must see you sometimes."

"Vere, there is no hope."

"Hush! I will not listen. We must meet sometimes;

you can not refuse me this, Beryl. Have I not the right to claim so much? Does not your own heart plead for me?"

Could Beryl resist that appeal? Had not her lover, indeed, the right he claimed? And, ah! how wildly her breaking heart pleaded for this one solace—to see him sometimes—not to be utterly severed from him! Trembling, her heart a very tumult of strangely blended joy and sorrow, she clung to the man whose love infolded her life as his arms infolded her form, and her quivering lips met his.

So was her answer given—so, for weal or for woe, did Beryl Carolan yield so much to her lover's prayer, and consent that they should sometimes see each other.

It was a long time before the silence between them was broken, and then Lorraine spoke very softly, telling Beryl that now he could wait with more patience, and surely he would one day be able to call her all his own; but she shook her head mournfully.

"It can never be," she said. "Oh, Vere, if you would only believe me when I say this!"

Lorraine shuddered and bowed his head on her breast again with broken words that startled her.

"If I could only know—great Heaven!--if I could only know the truth!"

It was clearly not of her past that he spoke; of what, then? Beryl laid her hand caressingly on the dark head.

"What truth, Vere?" she said, steadily.

He raised his hueless face.

"Don't ask me now!" he said, huskily, "another time I may be able to tell you; not now! I think it must have been a dream."

"A dream? Something that happened to you, Vere?"

"Ay, years ago, when I was in Australia."

"And you will not tell me now?" Beryl said, a little wistfully.

He did not answer her at once, and the girl added:

"Forgive me, I did not mean to pain you; and you know it is no doubt of you that made me ask; but I have no right to your confidence, withholding mine."

"Dearest! not such words—you pain me by uttering them—not by the question you asked, and you *have* a right to ask it, Beryl."

He paused a moment, and, held so close to him, she felt that he trembled.

"Another time," she whispered—"as you said; not now."

"Best now, perhaps, darling," Lorraine answered. "It was cowardice to wish to defer it; but the thought of that time has haunted me like a nightmare ever since. I dream of it; it forces itself upon my waking thoughts, and there is ever a cloud which no effort of mine can clear away."

He rose to his feet and began walking up and down the room. Beryl said not a word; she only watched him with a strange wistfulness in her violet eyes. Presently he came back to her and threw himself down beside her, clasping her hands in his.

"I am always striving, striving," he said, that latent look of suffering which was always in his dark eyes deepened to actual agony, "to remember what happened to me in those weeks when I was ill and helpless. Sometimes a word, a sentence, sounds familiar to me—so it was the other night—and yet I can not link things together; or say 'This was said to me,' or 'I heard this;' it is as if I had dreamed it; and yet there is so often the impression that it was no dream, but an actual experience."

"And yet," Beryl said, as he paused, "sick people have such strange fancies—visions that seem to them at the time so real, that you may be torturing yourself with nothing but a vague memory of some such fancies or visions."

"I try to believe that, Beryl—sometimes I succeed in believing it; but never for long together; the old horrible doubt returns, and then I blame myself that I let the doubt trouble me. Well! you don't know yet what I am talking of."

Beryl laid her golden head against him, and the trusting, tender action moved him so deeply that for a minute or two he could not speak. He bent down and pressed a fervent kiss on her brow. When he spoke, his voice was very low, and at first a little unsteady:

"It was ten years ago, Beryl, when I went to Australia. I had traveled all the beaten ground, and I wanted something new; so I sailed for Sydney, and from there went on into the interior. I was alone, but armed to the teeth, and they told me the country was safe. Besides, I was

always rather reckless, and I had been through too many wild regions unharmed to have learned much caution. I had a good horse—one I had bought in Sydney—and was making for a place called Barra Creek, about sixty miles up country, where I heard there was a splendid waterfall. I was approaching Barra Creek the second day after I left Sydney, for I took my time over the ride, enjoying the scenery, and it was near midnight—a glorious night—when I entered upon a stretch of bushland (easy ambush), so I kept a lookout, but not a very strict one; and it was not much use, for twenty men could have hidden within a few yards of me without my being able to see them. And suddenly I heard a whiz, then felt a sharp pain in my side, and I just remember reeling in the saddle—that was all.

“Next, I was lying on a couch, or bed, with a burning pain in my side, and feeling as if my head was on fire. I was in high fever, and I suppose delirious. I knew afterward (not then) that I was in a log-cabin belonging to a settler, but who or what he was I never knew. I have a vague impression of once seeing a rough-looking man—the impression came back to me the other night—”

“Where?—when?” asked Beryl, not lifting her head.

“At the Rodens’. Enid was describing a play they had seen, in which a pirate threatens the hero—‘I’ll put a bullet in your heart’ were the words, or nearly the words. They struck me with an actual shock, Beryl. For a few moments I felt dazed; I seemed to lose all sense of my real surroundings, and to see a rough room, such as I was in, and a man standing near me. I don’t know why I connected the words or the man with me; I can’t remember hearing such words, but they sounded familiar, and they brought the vision of that place as clearly before my mental view as if I had seen it with my physical sight.”

“How strange!” said Beryl, slowly, as her lover paused. “But this man—did he nurse you?”

“Ah! no.” He drew a long, silent breath and spoke the next words with an evident effort. “There was a girl—a child almost—I owed my life to her. Sweetheart,” for Beryl instinctively clung closer to him; he bent over her and once more his lips sought hers, “never dream that Nina was more to me than one to whom I owed deep gratitude. I had no distinct sense of her personality. I only

once saw her—to know that I saw her, and then it was in semi-darkness, and her features were further hidden by a shawl she had drawn over her head and round her face. Moreover, I was not even then in full possession of my faculties. What she was among such people as those wild, lawless settlers, Heaven knows; but to me she was devotion's self. Poor Nina! Heaven help her—and me!”

“And you?” repeated Beryl under her breath.

Lorraine pressed the golden head closer against his heart.

“Because,” he answered, after a pause, “I am sometimes haunted by the fear that Nina was my wife.”

“Your wife!” Beryl started up with wild, startled eyes. “Vere, what can you mean?”

“Beryl—Beryl!” cried Lorraine, passionately, “don't shrink from me! So,” wrapping her to his breast again, “have faith in me still, darling. Before Heaven, if marriage there was, it was a mockery, even if the priest were indeed a priest, for I knew not what I did—I was almost in a stupor—nay, I *can not* believe it was reality—it must have been a dream!”

“And if not a dream, a cruel fraud!” said Beryl. “But tell me—how did it seem to you? Do you recall a marriage with this girl as one recalls a dream?”

“Not so clearly. It seems to me as if some one—it might have been Nina, or any one else—were standing by me, her hand in mine, and then words of the marriage service were spoken—I know not whether all or only part—and a ring was taken from my little finger—that assuredly was no fancy, for the ring was stolen, whether then or at some other time. It was one I specially valued, for it had belonged to my mother—a gold hoop with a single opal set in it. I put that ring on Nina's finger, so it seemed to me, and I can not remember any more, even as a dream. Was it—could it be reality?”

“Surely a dream or a fancy,” said Beryl. “What motive could they have for forcing on you such a marriage, unless it were for the sake of your money, and then the girl would have claimed you.”

“Nay, she might not. It was only through her that I escaped.”

“Yes? Go on, Vere.”

“It must have been days after that dream, if dream it was,” Lorraine went on, “that I can recall feeling

strangely calm and free from pain. I had that kind of consciousness which often belongs to an early stage of recovery from illness. I knew things in a vague and misty way, and as if some one else was looking on at me, not as if I personally had any impression mental or physical. It did not seem to matter to me what became of me. I had no memory of the past—no thought for the future. I saw the rough walls of the cabin, the beams across the roof, the table and chairs, and other things. Three people were standing in a corner in the shadow; one was Nina, the other two were men. I could not see more than that. She was talking to them in a whisper, and presently she came up to me and knelt down before me. I thought she was weeping, and perhaps in the instinct of giving comfort, and feeling, half in a stupor though I was, that I owed my life to her, I bent forward to kiss her, but she started up with a cry like a wounded creature. Poor child!" His lips quivered, his soft voice grew husky. "It has been an added pain to me, Beryl—the fear that I may have unwittingly won that poor girl's heart."

"It would be strange," said Beryl, tremulously, "if she did *not* learn to love you!"

"My own love! it may seem easy to you to love me. And then Nina was a mere child; she would soon forget. The two men came up to me almost at once, and lifted me up and carried me out. I was put into some conveyance, and for hours afterward I was conscious of moving onward—sometimes smoothly, sometimes jolting, and at last I was lifted out and carried into some house.

"When full and clear consciousness came to me, I was in the house of a doctor in a town some miles from Sydney. I asked him how I came to be where I was, and he told me that he knew nothing; I had been brought there, and placed in his care. And nobly he cared for me. He knew my name; but without that he would have treated me with the same kindness. On his side he questioned me; but I thought it best, for poor Nina's sake, to remain silent, even about what I could remember. I told him I had been wounded by bushrangers, and nursed in some cabin, but I preferred not to say anything that could cause evil to those who had sheltered me and saved my life.

"So soon as I was able, I returned to England. I had, naturally, no desire to claim as a wife the daughter of a

bushranger—supposing that the marriage were not a sick man's fancy or a sham. Maybe the child is dead now; better dead than to grow up among the ruffians of such a settlement as Barra Creek. That is all, Beryl; I have kept nothing back. You know now what is the phantom that so often haunts me, which, while my reason repels it, makes my heart sometimes quail."

Beryl laid her soft, flushed cheek to his.

"Thank you so much—oh, so much," she whispered, "for telling me! But, Vere, why let this dread haunt you? If there were a marriage, these people could hardly prove it."

"I can not tell; they might have witnesses all ready to swear that I was in full possession of my senses. But assuredly I would never acknowledge a wife forced upon me—a woman, too, of probably criminal birth and antecedents, and whose life has most likely been what the lives of girls so trained in evil usually are."

Beryl bowed down her head against him in silence, and Lorraine had no will to break that silence. He only stooped, and lifting the girl's face from his breast, laid his lips to hers; and that kiss sealed the present and claimed the future.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS ROBBERY.

ONCE more Justin Harwood was able to "receive," and the *salon* in Hanover Street was opened again. The Athenians rejoiced; but at the Maple Tree there was less satisfaction, for not a few of the exiled "Hanoverians" took refuge at the club in St. James's Place, and lost their hundreds there, instead of in Harwood's *salon*.

One morning, while several men at the Athenian were rejoicing over the renewal of the old state of things, and the prospect of seeing *la belle* Carolan again that evening, Enid Roden drove to Norfolk Street to see Emilie Gresham. Enid had always been fond of Emilie, but her affection had of late been even more pronounced than formerly. Was it, Emilie asked herself, with a secret smile, because Vere Lorraine's name so often came on the *tapis*?

Emilie must have seen her young friend drive up; for as the door was opened to Enid, Mrs. Gresham hurried out

into the hall, but with a scared, troubled look blending with the welcome of eyes and lips.

"Oh, Enid!" she cried, "I am so glad to see you, dear! Such a dreadful thing has happened!"

"Oh, Emmie! what?" exclaimed Enid, scared in her turn.

"I don't mean death, or anything like that. Come in here, and I'll tell you all about it."

She drew Enid into the morning-room, and closed the door.

"Sit down," she said, putting Enid into a chair, but herself too excited to sit still. "I have been robbed last night—robbed of a quantity of jewels and about two hundred pounds in bank-notes."

"*Emmie—no!*"

Enid was up like an India-rubber ball.

"But I say yes," returned Mrs. Gresham. "I have written to Vere to ask him to come as soon as he possibly can. I know he's in court all to-day, so he can't anyhow come before the evening; but I've certainly been robbed, and the property was all in my dressing-room, too!"

"You might have been murdered, Emmie. Do you suspect any one in the house?"

"Certainly not. Sit down again, and I'll tell you all about it. I came home very late last night from a dance, and had told Lisette not to sit up for me. I laid the jewels I had worn on the toilet, where there always stands my jewel-case—you know it; and in it, in addition to the jewels, was this money. Lisette doesn't even know it was there, for I put it in myself yesterday evening, and had the key with me. Well, this morning, when I was getting up, Lisette came in and said, 'Madame, where is your jewel-case?' I ran into the dressing-room. The case was gone!"

"Oh, Emmie!" breathed Enid, too horrified for many words.

"Bodily gone!" repeated Emilie. "Now, I locked the dressing-room door before I went to bed; so the thief, whoever he was, must have actually concealed himself in the room."

"Oh! horrible, Emilie; it must have been one of the servants."

"I can not think that, Enid. They have all been a long time with me. Well, listen. Of course there was a terrible commotion, and I sent for the butler and the footman to inquire if any one had come to the house; if any of the girls had had a 'young man' about the place, or not. Stephen told me that about seven o'clock in the evening, shortly after I had left the house, he opened the door to a man, whom he described as a gentleman dressed something like a clergyman. He asked for me, and Stephen, not knowing whether I had yet gone, asked for the visitor's card, and said he would see if I was at home. The clergyman said he came from the East End, and the name on his card was the 'Reverend Arthur Roberts.' I don't know any one of that name. Stephen left the hall for a minute or two, and when he returned the clergyman was gone. Stephen was at first amazed; then he began to think it very odd; but he missed nothing from the hall, and probably thought no more about the matter. Now, I tell you what I think; that man was simply an expert thief; he knew I was out, and instead of going into the street, he had rushed upstairs when Stephen left him, and concealed himself in my dressing-room, and he may have left the house before I returned home. The hall-door closes very gently, and the servants below would be laughing and talking, and not notice anything short of a loud bang."

Enid sat staring at her friend, with horror in her brown eyes. Certainly it is not a pleasant reflection that a desperate burglar, to whom murder is simply a professional incident, may have been lying *perdu* in, or within easy reach of, one's sleeping apartment; and it looked very much as if Emmie Gresham's surmise were the correct one. If the visitor had really been a clergyman, he would not have "bolted" in the uncereemonious manner Mrs. Gresham had described. Still, to both the ladies, knowing little of the extraordinary skill and swiftness of the higher order of burglar, the exploit appeared almost too marvelous for belief.

"But it would be such a risk!" exclaimed Enid. "Suppose the man had met some one? He could not know every one was down-stairs."

"No, certainly; or that there was any place of concealment in the dressing-room. He might have found out where the jew 'case was. Vere says that these thieves

fraternize with gentleman's servants at public-houses, and get a lot out of them."

"I wonder whether Mr. Lorraine will agree with you about the thief?" said Enid. "You have sent to Scotland Yard?"

"Twenty minutes ago. I expect a detective every minute."

"Could Stephen describe the clergyman?"

"Only that he was elderly and had gray hair."

There was a knock at the door as she spoke, and in a few minutes a quiet-looking man was ushered into the morning-room. He announced himself as Mr. Browning, from Scotland Yard.

He asked a great many questions of Emilie which would never have occurred to that lady; among others, if any one besides her servants knew she kept her jewels in a case on her toilet?

"No one," she replied, "except a few intimate personal friends."

"And—er—Mr. Gresham, I suppose?"

Emmie's cheek flushed slightly.

"Yes," she said, quietly, "he did know it—but I don't understand—"

"Excuse me, madame, I meant no offense; but of course we are obliged to look at everything; and you can not imagine the tricks some of these burglars are up to. They—some of 'em—manage to get among swell people at race-courses and the like, and then they'll get chatting with gentlemen, and find out things the gentlemen 'ud never think they'd spoken about at all."

Emilie's color deepened, knowing that her husband was not always particular in his selection of companions.

"Could I see Mr. Gresham?" asked the detective.

"I don't think he could throw any light on the matter," returned Emilie. "My husband and I are separated; he does not live here."

"I beg your pardon, madame," stammered poor Mr. Browning, turning scarlet, but Emilie came to his rescue.

"Shall I call up the servants?" she asked, turning to the bell.

"If—if you please, madame; I should like to question them—but separately, please."

Emmie had not thought of that.

Stephen came in first, and told his story straightforwardly enough. The detective questioned him very keenly; but the man had nothing to conceal, and his face and manner, and the consistency of his account all evidenced that he was speaking the truth.

The other servants passed through the ordeal with equal success, and when they were all gone, Mr. Browning turned to Emilie:

"I don't think it's any one in the house, madame," he said. "May I see the dressing-room?"

Emilie and Enid went up with him, and he made a survey and took some notes.

The numbers of the bank-notes Mrs. Gresham could not supply; woman-like, she had omitted to take them down, but she gave a description of the missing jewels, which she valued at very nearly one thousand pounds.

"Have you any idea of the thief?" she asked; "any clew?"

The man shook his head.

"I'm inclined to think, Mrs. Gresham," he said, "that it's the same man who has committed two or three other clever robberies. You'll have heard of a robbery some three months ago down at Esher? The family were at dinner. The man must have been a regular catamount to get up to the dining-room window; but he walked off with about two thousand pounds' worth of jewels."

"He must have had accomplices," said Emilie.

Mr. Browning smiled.

"No, ma'am, that's it. My belief is that he works alone. Accomplices, sooner or later, 'blow on' each other. If a man is clever enough to work alone, then he's wise to have no pals. Well, ma'am, we'll do our best; and you'll let us know the moment you hear of anything?"

Of course the evening papers had a sensational and by no means correct description of a "Daring Robbery in the West End," and before six o'clock Emilie had told the story of her loss fully fifty times to eager callers.

At eight o'clock, when Mrs. Gresham was once more alone, feeling, naturally enough, very tired and very much worried, the drawing-room door opened gently, and Vere Lorraine walked in.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CROSS-QUESTIONED.

"HEARD the news, Harwood?"

"What news?"

The first speaker was an *habitué* of Hanover Street—Denman by name—a wealthy commoner, whose one passion was gaming on the turf and at the tables. He was playing dice with Justin Harwood, while some of the men played cards at other tables, and others hovered around Beryl in the drawing-room; among the latter was Herbert Gresham.

"What news?" repeated Denman. "About the robbery at Mrs. Gresham's?"

"Hush! speak low," said Harwood, quickly; "her husband's in the next room. Robbery at Mrs. Gresham's?" he repeated, "this is the first I heard of it."

"Haven't you seen an evening paper?"

"No; Beryl reads everything, but I don't. Tell me all about it."

Which Denman did, nothing loath.

Harwood listened, shrugged his shoulders, and laughed.

"That parson was the thief," he said, "or more likely the footman cooked him up, and the robbery was from the people inside the house."

"But they're old and faithful servants."

"I don't believe in old and faithful servants," said Harwood, dryly; "their trustworthiness is in inverse ratio to their length of service. Haven't all these fraudulent bank cashiers and managers of big firms been twenty and thirty years in the employ? Look out for squalls, say I, when a man has served you more than ten years."

"A cynical statement."

"Truth is cynical," said Harwood, throwing sixes. He often threw sixes, he was a singularly lucky hand.

In the drawing-room the men could not say much about the robbery, because of Herbert Gresham's presence; but presently Beryl drew him aside, to show him, she said, some etchings which had been lately given to her, and as she bent over the little table on which the portfolio lay, she said in a low voice:

"I am so sorry, so very sorry about the robbery of your wife's jewels."

"So am I," he answered, "and I can't help thinking one of the servants is the thief."

"You mean—you don't suppose the imaginary clergyman could have known where the jewels were kept?"

"Well, how should he know?"

"Anything may be discovered from servants; and then, you knew, didn't you?"

"I?—yes; but," with a half laugh, "I don't associate with thieves."

Beryl turned over one or two etchings before she said:

"You don't know what disguises thieves assume. You may have mentioned these jewels unguardedly, and been overheard."

"But I am sure I never have; I don't believe I ever spoke of the jewels except once, and that was here."

Beryl's pale cheek changed color—just a faint tint flushed it.

"Not to me," she said, quietly.

"No, no," said Gresham, divining her thought; "it was to Mr. Harwood."

"To Justin?" in a tone of surprise. "What in the world could bring such a subject on the *tapis*?"

"Oh, I forget now; I can't remember what led up to it; but I said keeping jewels and valuables in a dressing-room, as my wife did, was a foolish habit. Oh, I remember—it was *à propos* of that Esher robbery, when the thief got in at the dressing-room window."

"I read about that. Oh, well, one must not drive things to extremes; but it's generally wisest to keep a close tongue about such things. In this case, the robber might have discovered all he needed from the servants. The police don't seem to have any clew?"

"Not the slightest. I doubt if any of the jewels will be recovered."

"So do I. Were there any she had specially valued?"

"I don't know. I hope not."

He said it in a tone that he would not have used once about his wife. There was real feeling, evident pain and regret, and it gave Beryl renewed hope. She was silent for a minute or two, and when she next spoke it was about the etchings; and presently she turned away, and they

rejoined the men, who had been wondering what Beryl Carolan could have to say to Gresh that she granted him a *quattr occhi*, for she rarely showed favor to any one.

But why did Beryl when, a little later, she found herself alone for a minute, steal away to the little *boudoir* where Lorraine had first told her he loved her, and sink down, covering her face with a passionate, voiceless cry?

“How can I bear it? Oh, *Madonna mia*, how can I bear it? It is killing me! And, oh, would that I were dead!”

She dropped her hands with a start, hearing a step; but it passed by. She sat gazing fixedly before her.

“Why is it such a sin,” she half whispered, “to take one’s own life? Would it not save *him*?—save me from temptation? Ah, no, no! Suicide is but a coward’s refuge. If I can die for him, can not I also live and suffer for him? But, oh, life is so cruel—so cruel!”

She rose up presently, and returned to the drawing-room, and then sauntered into the card-room, but, as always, refused to play.

About three A. M. the last guest departed, and Beryl and Harwood were alone. He laid his head back on the couch on which he was reclining, and closed his eyes.

“I am not quite myself yet,” he said. “I am tired. A blight on that young fool!”

Beryl, who was sweeping up some of the cards and putting them away, observed, coolly:

“Lucky for you we are in London, and not in 'Frisco, or even Barcelona.”

“I suppose you mean some one else would have finished the job? Well, even here, Delves might have done that if Lorraine had not interfered. That was generous, wasn’t it, eh?” with a short laugh.

“It was what you didn’t deserve, Justin.”

“You’re polite, my dear. Perhaps you wouldn’t have been sorry if the bullet had gone a little more straight?”

She did not answer that, but tossing some cards into a drawer, came up to the table near which Harwood’s couch was placed, and stood leaning against it, looking down at her step-father, who had closed his eyes again.

“Justin!” she said.

He opened his eyes and looked up.

"Well?" he answered, shifting his glance at once from the steady gaze he encountered.

"Do you want," said Beryl, quietly; but Harwood hated that quiet manner of hers above all things—it was "dangerous"—"do you want to drive me to desperation?"

"Desperation?" he said, audaciously. "What's up now? What are you talking of?"

"You know what I am talking of, Justin. Walls have ears. No need to mention names or define circumstances too clearly. Why can't you let alone people so near home?"

"Why can't I? Because I practice wherever I see an opening. Sentiment and business don't agree together, Beryl. I found that out long ago."

"You!" with a scornful laugh. "You had nothing to discover in that line. You must have been bad from the beginning. Heaven knows what evil strain there is in your nature; but you never had heart or principle. However, I am only warning you."

"Warning me?" he said, half raising himself. "Threatening, you mean, and not for the first time. How often am I to tell you that you *daren't* play down on me!"

"Daren't!" said Beryl, through her teeth. "How do you know what I dare do—what I *will* do—if you drive me to it? Which of us two would suffer most if I used the power I hold? I am a necessity to you. Who would come to this *salon* if I were not here? But are you a necessity to me?"

"There—there!" said Harwood, shrinking and turning pale; "let's have no more words. What's done can't be undone—that's flat, anyhow; and if I lost most in one way by your blowing the gaff, you'd lose all you've been playing for ever since we made the bargain!"

"Don't trust to that motive!" said Beryl, with that fierce blaze in her blue eyes Harwood had seen before. "I tell you there are times when I feel that I could throw everything—everything—to the four winds—reveal the whole truth—and hide myself where I could never be found, or kill myself! My brain grows dizzy under the load it has to bear! You shall obey me in this, Justin, or, as sure as there is a heaven above us, I will not answer for what I may do!"

She turned away and began pacing up and down the room.

Harwood, who had grown paler and paler while she spoke, until his usually somewhat ruddy complexion was almost livid, watched her in silence. He was afraid of her, and whatever rage there was in his heart, he dared not give it utterance. Beryl, he knew, was not one to utter mere empty threats; she was perfectly capable of doing anything which she said she would or might do.

Many women say things under the influence of strong passion, which, in a calmer moment, they would not dream of carrying out; but Beryl, even when she spoke in white heat, had always that dangerous underlying passion—that steady, indomitable will, which remained unshaken by the storm above.

Even a stranger would have received the impression that what this girl said, however passionate her utterance, *she meant*; and Justin Harwood, though he understood Beryl's nature little enough, had at least proved by experience that she was as different as possible from the ordinary run of women, and about as "ticklish a customer"—to put it in his own language—as any one could have to deal with.

Presently Beryl came back to her old position.

"I don't demand promises from you," she said; "they would be useless; I simply dictate terms. What you are afraid to do—from that you will abstain!"

"I like your style!" said Harwood, trying to hide his anger and fear—but how ineffectually!—under banter. "But how was I to know you would object to this particular business?"

"Justin," said the girl, with that kind of carelessness which is the finest expression of utter contempt, "I wonder you haven't given up long ago lying to me! I don't know why you do it; you can't, for an instant, imagine you deceive me! *Eh bien!* you know now whom to let alone; don't let such a thing occur again—that's all! You have been warned, and so no more need be said!"

She moved away, turning to the door.

"There has been too much said already!" growled Harwood, as she opened the door; but Beryl made no answer.

She quitted the room, leaving her step-father in possession of the barren privilege of the last word.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PINK AMETHYSTS.

A WEEK passed, and still there was no clew to the robber of Emilie Gresham's jewels.

Lorraine, after examining the servants, had come to the conclusion that one of them was implicated.

"It is the man made up as a clergyman," he said; "and so adroit a thief will not be easily caught."

And so Scotland Yard found.

It was of course impossible for the busy Q. C. to give any time to thief-catching, or it might have gone hard with the clever operator. With ordinary detectives he doubtless knew how to deal, and he succeeded in baffling all attempts to trace him.

Fortunately for her, Emilie was rich; and though the loss was serious and annoying, it did not gravely affect her. Nor was she a woman to grieve very bitterly over a mere monetary loss which she was quite able to make good.

But Vere presented her with a very beautiful set of pearls; and Enid, and May, and Mrs. Roden made her some handsome presents of jewels, as did other friends. Every one liked Emilie Gresham, and sympathized with her in her loss.

One Saturday afternoon in March, Lorraine suddenly presented himself in Norfolk Street; and Emilie, who was practicing a new song at the piano, sprung up in a whirl of delight.

"Why, Vere!" she cried, running up to him—"what an unlooked-for treat!"

"To me as well," said he, kissing her affectionately. "If you are disengaged, run and put on your hat and come with me to the Winter Exhibition at the Grosvenor. I promised to take you some day."

"Oh, Vere, how good of you! But you shouldn't immolate yourself."

"Do I immolate myself when I am with you, Emilie?" said Lorraine, putting his hands on her shoulders, and looking down into her earnest eyes.

"Forgive me, Vere"—the tears came into her eyes—"but I really meant it!"

"I know you did, dear; you are one of the few truthful people in the world. Now run off, and don't be half an hour dressing. We will walk down; it will do you much more good than driving."

"Oh, yes; and I never am half an hour dressing, Vere."

"Well, twenty-seven minutes, then!"

Emilie shook her fist at him and went quickly out of the room.

She returned triumphant within twenty minutes, habited in furs.

"Here I am," she said, courtesying. "What!" as Lorraine looked at his watch, "have you been timing me?"

"Just seventeen minutes," said he, gravely. "You really deserve a certificate of merit, Em."

"A gold medal!"

"H'm! You will come to that, I hope—"

Before Emilie could reply, a servant entered with a small packet addressed to "Mrs. Gresham."

"From whom?" she asked.

"A commissionaire left it, ma'am, and there was no message."

The servant retired, and Emilie critically examined the address, but could not recognize the writing; nor did Lorraine.

"Open the packet," he said, smiling, "I know you are dying with curiosity. I can wait."

He produced a penknife and cut the outer fastenings, and there was presently displayed a crimson plush jewel-case. Emilie opened it, and discovered within a superb set of pink amethysts.

"Oh," she exclaimed, under her breath, "how lovely! But who sent them? There is no card."

"It is an exquisite gift!" said Lorraine. "Do you know of any one likely to make such a choice? Amethysts are not your favorite stones."

"No—"

Suddenly she paused—a flood of crimson rushed over cheek and brow. She sat down, feeling half dizzy with the emotion called up by the wild thought that had flashed across her.

Vere, instantly divining that thought, said nothing (as was best), but only laid a light, tender hand on her shoulder.

Emilie, her face still lower down, put up her hands and drew her cousin's hand within them, clinging to it; and this seemed to help her to regain her self-command.

"Please forgive me," she whispered, at length. "It was so foolish of me to think that—at least, I did not think it; the idea flashed into my mind, that was all. They were *his* favorite stones, you know."

There were tears in Lorraine's dark eyes as well as in Emmie's, and his soft voice was not quite steady as he bent over her.

"Dear Emmie," he said, "there was nothing foolish in the thought. It is possible he may have sent you this gift."

"Vere—no—no, don't tempt me!" cried Emmie, bursting into passionate weeping.

He soothed her with all a brother's loving tenderness, and when she was able to listen to him again, he said, gently:

"You have not forgotten, Emmie, the message Beryl Carolan gave to you?"

"Forget it! Could I ever forget it? I can never think hardly of her after that," said Emilie, fervently.

Lorraine's clasp closed almost convulsively over his cousin's hand as he spoke those words. It was the only sign of emotion he gave, and perhaps she only partially understood it. He went on:

"I have thought sometimes lately that Herbert is not quite what he used to be. Seldom though I see him, I have received that impression, and I have gathered, through veiled questioning of men who know him intimately, things about him which have given me hope—a hope too vague to utter to you; but now it seems only right to speak of it."

"Oh," Emilie scarcely breathed, "even that hope is like air when one is stifling! But if there is a change, to what influence can it be due? I was told he was infatuated with Beryl Carolan."

"Yet she may be his better angel, Emmie. Ah, you do not know her; and I only speak, as to facts, from an impression of my own."

"If it be so," said Emilie, chokingly—"if, through her, he should return to the better self he has so long cast from him, I will go to her and thank her on my knees!"

"Heaven bless you, Emmie!" said Lorraine, hoarsely; and turning away, he walked through the room.

Even his self-command gave way before those words of his cousin. But it was a brief struggle, if a sharp one.

He turned back almost immediately. Emilie had risen to her feet.

"Thank you so much!" she said, lifting her tear-stained face, with a tremulous smile, to his. "Now shall we go on?"

"Would you rather not, Emmie, dear?"

"No; it will do me good, and I shall enjoy everything the more after what has passed."

She took up the casket with a loving, caressing touch, and locked it away carefully; then she rejoined her cousin, and they went out together.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT THE GROSVENOR.

It was one of those spring-like days which we sometimes have in early March, and which serve to cheat the unwary into doffing winter apparel, and then the next day brings a blustering north-easter and a finely developed attack of bronchitis to the unlucky wights who have abandoned fur for thinner materials.

Emilie Gresham enjoyed the walk to Bond Street, which to her was a fair distance, for, like most fashionable ladies, she was a poor pedestrian. Not much was said on the way; the hearts of both were full; but there was too much sympathy between them for words to be necessary, and Emilie was happier to-day than she had been for many a month.

The gallery was pretty full when the two reached it, and of course both knew so many people that hand-shakes and other greetings were continually passing.

"What, *you*, Mr. Lorraine!" cried the Countess of Lumley, bearing down full sail in a glory of velvet and sealskin. "What a treat—you're surely not alone?"

Emilie had turned aside to speak to a friend.

"No," he said, smiling, "my cousin, Mrs. Gresham, is with me."

"Indeed!"

Lady Lumley did not know Emmie personally.

"Have you been here before? Charming pictures, are they not?" she had not seen one of them. "By the way, I saw your friends, the Rodens, in the next room—the two girls and Mrs. Roden. How pretty the eldest is—so charming!"

Lorraine assented, and was glad when, after a minute or two, he was able, diplomatically and gracefully, to extricate himself from her voluble ladyship.

"That woman is a terror!" he said to Emilie. "The chattering of a dozen jays is nothing to her tongue. By the way, she says the Rodens are in the next room."

"Are they?" exclaimed Emilie; "we must go and speak to them. That's one advantage of the Grosvenor over Burlington House, you can easily find your friends."

"Yes, but it has its reverse," said Lorraine, smiling, "they can so easily find you."

"The poor countess! But you don't want to avoid the Rodens?"

"Certainly not."

They passed on, looking at the pictures as they went, and presently entered the other room; and then May Roden, standing by Enid's side, saw a sudden flush on her sister's cheek, a sudden light flash over her whole face.

Following Enid's eyes, May beheld the cause of this change—the tall form and handsome features of Vere Lorraine.

"Why, Enid," she said, "mamma, there is Mr. Lorraine with Mrs. Gresham."

"Oh, yes," said Enid, as if she had not seen Lorraine before.

And at the same instant Lorraine and his companion turned and crossed the room to meet their friends.

"Lady Lumley told me you were here," said Lorraine, as he shook hands with Enid; and again did she accept that pronoun in the singular, though he had meant it in the plural.

"Yes?" said Enid, scarcely knowing for the moment what else to say. "Have you been here long?"

"About twenty minutes. Lord ——'s Titian is in this room. Have you seen it yet?"

"No, not yet. Is it so very fine?"

"A gem. Let me show it to you."

He led her away to where the picture hung, Enid's heart

beating happily with the thought that he only made this an excuse to have her more to himself; whereas Lorraine's motive was purely artistic, and he had not the remotest desire to appropriate Enid, nor any idea that she supposed he had.

The Titian was all a blur to Miss Roden. She just managed to gather what the subject was, more from what Lorraine said to her about it than from the canvas, and that was all. The veriest daub that ever was painted would have been the same to her as this glorious old Italian picture glowing with the soft rich tints of the great master.

"It is very beautiful," she said, thinking only of the man by her side, while he looked at the picture with the deep pleasure of the art lover, and had well-nigh forgotten Enid.

Presently she moved a step onward, and Lorraine, recalled from the Titian to Enid Roden, followed.

"I like that," she said, pointing to a graceful but rather weak woman's head. "Don't you?"

"Not very much, I confess. It wants vigor both in expression and in drawing."

"Ah! I am no judge of art," said Enid, half sighing. "But I don't think a woman needs vigor so much as a man."

The assertion was half a question, and a question difficult to answer, for Lorraine held a directly contrary opinion, and vigor was not a salient characteristic of his pretty companion. He bit his lip under his mustache, but judged it wiser to ignore the question, and treat the remark simply as an expression of opinion.

"There are so many different views on that point," he said, smiling. "Naturally, one would not regard vigor as the *first* essential in a woman."

The answer did not quite satisfy Enid. Though not so quick-witted as her sister May, she could perceive that Lorraine had evaded the subject on which she wished to elicit his opinion. She felt vexed and wounded, and turned away almost pettishly, while Lorraine's attention was caught by a lovely female head by Carlo Dolce, the pose and face of which somehow reminded him of Beryl's, as well as the red gold of the clustering hair.

"Whom are all the people staring at?" suddenly said Enid's voice.

Lorraine looked round. People were crowding, and whispering, and craning their necks to stare at some one or something near the door. The next moment the man's heart leaped up with a fierce throb of joy. It was but a glimpse he had caught of golden hair, a falling plume, but it was enough. He said, quietly:

"It is Miss Carolan."

"Beryl Carolan?"

The name fell mechanically from Enid's lips. She flushed and paled in a breath, and darted a swift, instinctive glance at her companion; but his face revealed nothing. Whether the advent of Beryl Carolan on the scene made any difference to him, Enid could not tell, and hope urged her to conclude that he was as indifferent to Beryl as a man ever is to very beautiful women. Yet jealousy was busy, too, at Enid's heart. Though she hardly recognized the change of feeling in herself, and certainly did not trace it to its real cause, her mental attitude toward Beryl was not what it used to be. It was not so long ago that, if not restrained, she would, on meeting Beryl, no matter where, have distinctly acknowledged her presence. Now she felt embarrassed. She did not want to "cut" her some-time friend and favorite, but she shrunk from being brought face to face with her, so that there was no alternative but to greet or give the "go by," though probably Beryl's pride and diplomacy would be equal to the occasion.

Lorraine, of course, saw Enid's difficulty, though he had no intention himself of passing Beryl unrecognized, should they meet; and, indeed, he would seek her out and speak to her.

"Shall we come this way?" he said. "There are some of Tintoretto's you ought to see."

They moved onward, and Enid kept her eyes religiously fixed on the pictures, which she did not see. She felt her cheeks burning, and jealous pangs shot through her heart as she heard the remarks of by-standers:

"How beautiful she is!—what a smile!"

"*C'est un printemps!*" said one man, quoting Sarcey's encomium on the smile of Mademoiselle Reichemberg.

Lorraine looked, and saw Beryl full now; but she was not looking his way; she was talking to Anatole Marceau, who accompanied her, while half a dozen men hung about her steps.

The girl was dressed entirely in a suit of dark but pale moss-green plush, the only relief being the cream-hued feathers in the graceful Restoration hat; and was there any picture on the walls, rich in female loveliness, to vie with her? Lorraine thought—and not he alone.

“I can’t take my eyes off her,” said Emilie Gresham to May; and she added, within herself: “If I feel so, I wonder how it is with Vere?”

“I wish I could speak to her,” said May, who only wanted a word of encouragement; but that word she did not get from Emilie.

“You mustn’t do it, dear,” she said; “and it would not be a kindness to Miss Carolan—she has distinctly broken off all friendship—you would only put her in a painful position, and make Mrs. Roden very angry. Besides, some of the men about her—”

Emilie paused.

“Oh, I know I mustn’t,” said May, hastily, with a choking feeling in her throat; “but I wish I could, all the same. There are Enid and Mr. Lorraine over there; let’s join them.”

Which they did; and Lorraine, after a moment, turned away, with a word of apology, to speak to Beryl.

She was standing before a group of Salvatore Rosa’s, and turned round even before she could have seen Lorraine approaching. Did some other than an outward sense tell her when he was near?

“Ah! Mr. Lorraine,” she said, with a smile, holding out her hand. “I saw you some minutes ago.”

How close his clasp of that little hand only she could know.

“I came here with my cousin Emmie,” he answered, “and we met the Rodens. Monsieur Marceau, are you a lover of old masters?”

“Not he,” said Beryl; “he is my escort, that’s all; and I have had to tell him half a dozen times not to chatter when I am looking at the pictures.”

“Then must I, too, be silent while you study that Salvatore?” asked Lorraine, a little quizzically.

“You!” Just one flash from the violet eyes into the dark hazel eyes. “You don’t chatter.” And then, almost under her breath, with an inexpressible softness of tone: “And if you did, I should never ask you to be silent.”

How the man's heart throbbed within him! But who would have divined this who looked in his face? Here, in this crowd, Vere Lorraine and Beryl Carolan were only acquaintances; at the outside, friends.

"Poor me!" said Anatole, with a dramatic sigh. "Mr. Lorraine, Beryl is very cruel to me!"

"You have your remedy," said she, laughing—"avoid me!"

"Ah! that I can not do."

"Then you have nothing to complain of; I never can help teasing you, Anatole, *mon cher*! Mr. Lorraine, look at this Giotto; is it not lovely?"

"I will try to look at it," he said in a low tone, as they moved onward a little, to get a better view of the picture.

"You must not only try," said the girl, half archly, "for I want your opinion. By the way, I hear that May Roden's portrait is finished. Have you seen it?"

"Yes; and it is one of the best things Hazlemere ever did; a perfect likeness, too."

"I can quite understand that the picture is one of his best," said Beryl, with a curious smile hovering on her lips. "Can't you?"

Lorraine glanced at her, and smiled too.

"What made you think—what you do think, Beryl?"

"A good many things. I won't ask you if it is so; it may be a matter of confidence between you and him; but what do you suppose *le père et la mère* would say to him?"

"I think her happiness will carry the day; though they may offer some opposition."

"I hope it will; if not, they will be greatly to blame for throwing her in the way of a good-looking, attractive fellow like Hazlemere. Now, I must not keep you from your cousin and the others."

"They can spare me for a few minutes longer. I must come and see you soon."

"Yes, if you wish it," said Beryl, with a catch in her breath.

They were standing a little apart now from the crowd, so that, by speaking very low, their words, amid the general buzz of voices and footsteps, could not be overheard.

"You have my promise," the girl added.

"Is that all, Beryl? Am I merely exacting a pledge?"

"No—no! I want only too much to keep my word—you know that!"

"My own love! yes, I know it; but I could not resist the happiness of making your lips again confess it. Tell me when I am likely to find you alone?"

"I am not often alone," Beryl said, bitterly; "that is a boon denied to me. Come to-morrow at half past two. I am not at home until four o'clock."

"Thanks, a thousand times. Well, if I can not stay long with you, it is at least a glimpse of paradise; it is something to be even under the same roof with you."

He shook hands with her, outwardly like an ordinary friend, and raising his hat, turned away to rejoin the Rodens and Emilie Gresham.

"Beryl likes well enough to keep such a man as Lorraine by her side," thought Enid, who had joined her mother. "What can everybody think of her? And all the people staring at her as they do! She doesn't seem to care one bit! They will say all sorts of things of Lorraine if he talks to her like that in public!"

"Where is Mr. Lorraine now?" said Mrs. Roden, presently, eyeglass in eye. "He has left Miss Carolan."

"Oh! has he?" said Enid, with extraordinary indifference.

"It would have been quite enough, I think," said Mrs. Roden, "to have shaken hands with her and said a few words. He need not talk to her for ten minutes, as he did."

"Well, mamma," observed Enid, rather offended than conciliated by the suggestion that she was neglected, "Mr. Lorraine was not with us; he met us only by chance; and as to Emmie, they are like brother and sister."

"I dare say, too," added Mrs. Roden, "Miss Carolan was not disposed to let him off so easily. She is an extraordinary beautiful woman, and she knows her power."

A vague wave of doubt crossed Enid's mind and held her silent; but she tried to reject the doubt as a wrong to both Lorraine and Beryl. Her very jealousy, too, made her unwilling to think that the man she loved was seriously fascinated with another woman; but a doubt, once entertained, is not so easily got rid of; and that night, in the solitude of her own apartment, Enid found herself ques-

tioning why Beryl should be altogether above temptation—why Vere Lorraine should not succumb to the influence of a creature so richly endowed with that “fatal gift of beauty” which has wrought havoc in men’s lives, and in the peace of nations, from Helen downward?

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WARNING UNHEEDED.

MR. HARRINGTON, or “Father Bernard,” as he was familiarly called among his flock, was far too busy and earnest a parish priest to find much time for visiting among his equals.

“Those who want to see me,” he said, “must come to see me in the limited time I have for seeing my friends; it is impossible for me to go to them.”

But it happened one day he was obliged to come to the West End about some books required for the church, and also to call upon a brother priest in Kensington, to give him the particulars of certain guilds to form a model for the latter to work upon. On reaching his friend’s house, however, he found that the clergyman had been suddenly summoned to a dying parishioner. It then occurred to Mr. Harrington to call on the Rodens; and indeed he was glad of the opportunity of doing so, for he had an ulterior object in view.

When he entered the drawing-room, Mrs. Roden came forward with cordial greeting.

“This is indeed an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Harrington,” she said. “I had given up all hopes of persuading you to come to see us.”

“I have been obliged to deny myself that pleasure,” he answered, “for I can scarcely ever get away from my parish; but being in your neighborhood to-day, I ventured to call.”

“I am grateful to the business that brought you,” said Mrs. Roden. “The girls will be so sorry; they have gone to-day to a concert with Mrs. Gresham, and will finish the evening at her house.”

“I must hope to see them another time,” said Mr. Harrington, too punctiliously truthful to say he was sorry to miss seeing them to-day; for, indeed, their presence would

have been fatal to the main purpose of his visit. "I suppose Mrs. Gresham has heard nothing of her lost jewels?"

"No; I am afraid the affair will remain, like our loss, a mystery. Mr. Lorraine does not think it was any one in the house; and it is certain the supposed clergyman was an impostor, for there is no man of the name he gave among the East End clergy."

"No, there is not. Fortunately, Mrs. Gresham will not feel her loss as many would. Have you seen Mr. Lorraine lately?"

"He dined with us yesterday evening," replied Mrs. Roden, ignoring the meeting at the Grosvenor. She did not want Mr. Harrington to imagine that Beryl Carolan was in any sense a rival to Enid Roden, and her hopes had risen again with last evening. "He will be at Mrs. Gresham's to-night," she added, smiling.

The priest smiled too.

"Perhaps," he said, "he finds there 'metal more attractive' than in even his cousin Emilie."

"Well, I think so. He certainly seems to take pleasure in Enid's society, and I am sure he would make any woman happy."

"If he loved her," said Mr. Harrington; "and, perhaps, if he did not—always supposing her not to be very exacting."

"Why, Mr. Harrington," said his hostess, stretching out her hand to the bell to ring for tea, "have you the romantic opinion about marriage, that people must be what is called 'in love' with each other to be happy?"

"To be happy—and to be safe," replied the priest, gravely; "that is, if they are people of strong feeling. Yes, I am afraid I must plead guilty to what you call a romantic opinion. If I had a daughter, I would not give her to such a man as Lorraine unless he loved her—as he can love; a mild affection would not do."

Mrs. Roden looked at the speaker in surprise. Her gamut of emotion was within an octave, and her idea of marriage strictly conventional.

"You do not mean," she said, "that he would neglect his wife?"

"Certainly not, so far as I know him. I should say he would try his utmost to make her happy; but, you know, in some characters there are no medium lights, and Lor-

raine's is one of those. His own life would be a torture to him if he could not give a full and perfect love, and his high sense of honor would make existence, under such conditions, more difficult for him than for men without conscience; and then there is always the danger of temptation."

"Y-yes," assented Mrs. Roden, who did not very clearly comprehend Mr. Harrington's views. "But don't you think a woman can, in the end, always by her devotion, win love?"

"A perilous experiment after marriage; it should come before, when failure need not be disastrous. I can not assent to the 'always;' it appears to me—pardon me—a conventional idea. I have known more than one life wrecked on the supposition that love invariably begets love."

"Are you saying all this," asked Mrs. Roden, after a pause, "*à propos?*"

"Forgive me—only as a warning. I mean this—you must pardon me for saying so much—that Vere Lorraine is a man capable of an extraordinary depth and strength of love. If he could give that to the woman he would marry, well and good; if not, the marriage would be a horrible mistake."

"You speak strongly. But," said Mrs. Roden, a little nettled at what seemed to her throwing doubt on Enid's capacity to call forth such passion, "may he not so love Enid?"

"He may, Mrs. Roden; I can not tell;" but in his heart he said, "Heaven forbid!"

"But in any case," continued the lady, "few people love in that fashion; and yet the world goes on pretty well."

"It all depends," said Mr. Harrington, dryly, "on what one means by 'pretty well.' But in any case"—this last to himself—"Vere Lorraine must not marry Enid Roden!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A BLOCK IN THE STRAND.

WHILE Bernard Harrington was troubled with the fear that Vere Lorraine was learning to love Enid Roden, Enid herself could not shake off the jealous doubts that oppressed

her; and as mischief never lacks company, two or three things that came to her ears—bits of idle gossip about Beryl and Vere Lorraine—tended to feed the flame that was burning in poor Enid's heart.

When, a few days after that unlucky Saturday at the Grosvenor, Lorraine dined in Kensington Gore, the girl's doubts and fears were for the time almost lulled to rest. She yielded to the fascination of Lorraine's actual presence, and that subtle influence which he exercised over most people was, naturally, ten times more potent with the woman who had already given him her heart; but when he was gone, when Enid was alone in her chamber at night, she was "hope-lifted, doubt-depressed," now recalling something in Lorraine's tone and manner to herself to which her imagination gave a wholly false significance; now remembering how he had lingered by Beryl's side at the Grosvenor; and that "it was said" he was often in Hanover Street, and "it was said" this thing and that; and "Beryl is cruel!" sobbed Enid. "Why must she have every man at her feet? What does she care for Vere Lorraine? She likes to be worshiped, she likes dominion, that's all, and she'll throw him over as she has others."

Oh, Enid, jealousy is making sad havoc with your loyalty!

May, preoccupied though she was, was too quick-witted not to notice that her sister had some trouble; but two or three attempts to fathom it had failed.

Enid, whose moods had grown very variable, became downright pettish when May one night tried to question her too closely.

"Oh, pray let me alone!" she said, "there's nothing the matter, and for goodness' sake, don't say anything to mamma or Emmie."

"I am not likely to do that," retorted May, a good deal wounded; and she went out of the room with her head in the air.

So Enid's heart fed on itself, and jealousy is not wholesome fare.

It chanced that one day—one unfortunate day, as it turned out—Enid, May, and a married friend—a Mrs. Nesbitt—went to a *matinée* in the Strand, which Enid did not enjoy, because her mind was entirely fixed on other things; and Enid was essentially of a brooding disposition;

she had not the energy to shake off anything that troubled her, and sentiment outbalanced reason.

It was half past five, and, of course, at this time of the year broad daylight when the party left the theater, and Enid leaned back in the corner of the carriage, while May and Mrs. Nesbitt talked about the play.

Enid had a headache, she said, which was not exactly true; but it is one of the licensed "tarra-diddles" of society, and as it is generally accepted as a polite rendering of "don't bore me!" it can hardly be called a falsehood, since no one is deceived.

Suddenly the carriage stopped; there was a block—a not uncommon occurrence in the Strand at the "witching hour" when *matinées* pour forth their hundreds and a large part of the business world is *en route* for home.

"Oh, dear, what a bother!" exclaimed May; "and how did you like Miss Rock, Mrs. Nesbitt? I thought her charming," etc.

Enid bent forward a little, wondering if the dark brougham with the beautiful bay horse that had pulled up almost alongside of the Roden carriage belonged to any one she knew. Another moment, and the bay horse drew forward a little more, bringing the two broughams exactly opposite to each other, and Enid, who backed the horse, could see right into the dark brougham without moving from her position. She started violently, and the crimson rushed to her brow, for her gaze was on forms and faces only too well known—Beryl Carolan and Vere Lorraine.

There was a half smile on the girl's beautiful mouth, and her eyes were drooping, while Lorraine, bending down to her, seemed to be talking softly and earnestly. There was something in his aspect and manner, in his very attitude, in the light reflected on the face of her to whom he spoke, that made Enid's heart turn sick with jealous pain; and then, suddenly, Lorraine moved a little, so that she caught a fuller view of his features, and she saw then the look "that takes the breath" of the woman who meets it in a man's eyes—that is, if she loves him.

Just a second, a flash, and the handsome head was bent down again; and then the Roden coachman saw an opening, drew off in front, and the dark brougham was lost to sight. Enid was still from the very tumult within her; blind and dizzy with passion, she saw and heard nothing;

the voices of her companions were only part of the din that filled her ears. Happily they did not notice her sitting in her corner; if they had done so, the "headache" theory would silence Mrs. Nesbitt, and May must know the truth, anyhow, sooner or later.

So this was it—Vere Lorraine loved Beryl Carolan—a miserable "infatuation," for where could it end? and Beryl was most to blame; she was using her power wickedly. Enid was too thoroughly upset to join the circle at dinner. Still, under the plea of a headache she remained in her own room, accepting nothing but a little tea, and she wept and sobbed until she gained the headache she had before only feigned.

May kept her own counsel until she retired for the night. Then she went straight to Enid's apartment and tapped at the door.

"Come in," said Enid's voice, faintly; and May entered and closed the door.

Enid was sitting back in an arm-chair by the fire, wrapped in a loose dressing-gown, and looking thoroughly ill.

"What, Enid!" said her sister, "not in bed yet?"

Enid shook her head, but made no reply in words. May came forward and stood on the hearth-rug.

"Enid," said she, gently, "you must tell me what it is that's making you so unhappy; I can't bear to see it. I know partly the cause, but not all; and perhaps if you gave me your confidence I might help you."

"You know the cause?" repeated Enid. "What do you mean, May?"

"I am not blind," said the other, kneeling down by her sister and taking her hand. "It's about Lorraine, isn't it?"

Enid flushed scarlet, and an angry light shone in her usually soft eyes.

"He is cruel and unjust," she said, trembling. "He makes me believe that he cares for me, and all the time he is the slave of that girl who cares no more for him than for any other man."

"What girl?" exclaimed May, in surprise.

"What girl? Why, Beryl Carolan, of course!"

"Oh, Enid, you can not think her heartless! And what

makes you think Lorraine cares for her? You have heard some gossip—”

“No,” said Enid, almost violently, “it is more than that. I have seen for myself.”

“Seen what?”

“To-day, when we were blocked in the Strand, there was a carriage close to ours. I could see into it, and I saw Beryl and Vere Lorraine. He was bending down to her, as a lover might do—”

She paused.

May interposed.

“But, Enid, you forget; Beryl would allow more of that sort of manner from men than women differently brought up. She has led altogether a free, less conventional life, and has always been used to be worshiped.”

“But how comes she driving about with Mr. Lorraine? If she does not want her name to be linked with his in the worst sense, would she behave like that?”

“Enid, dear,” expostulated May, “be reasonable. I don’t suppose Beryl had been driving with Lorraine. Probably she saw him as he was on his way homeward, and had simply offered him a seat in the brougham.”

“Oh, possibly,” returned Enid, bitterly; “but Beryl wouldn’t care; why should she? And that isn’t all. I saw his face”—she turned aside her own, coloring deeply again, and her voice faltered—“just for a moment, and I could see by his look that he loved her!”

There was a minute’s dead silence.

Enid’s last words were the greater shock to her sister that they were less a revelation than the confirming (as she felt now) of previous doubts. It was so likely, after all, that Lorraine should love Beryl Carolan; it was not easy for a man to come within the sphere of her influence and escape scatheless, and in her Lorraine could find perfect sympathy with his own nature.

May had argued with herself: “He knows marriage with Beryl is impossible. He has withdrawn himself while there is time, and is falling back on a calmer, less passionate, but safer love.” A thing impossible to Vere Lorraine; but how should May know this?

She drew her illustrations from what she had read and some things she had heard. She was too young, and her life had been too flowery, for the teachings of experience.

Then came the rumors that disquieted Enid; and May, somewhat troubled also, watched Lorraine more closely when he and Enid were together; and courteous, attentive, tender as his manner was, it was not, so said sage May, like a lover's manner—not like (this hardly whispered in her heart)—not like Ulric Hazlemere's manner to herself.

Was Enid, then, deceiving herself? Had Lorraine ever dreamed of wooing her, or had he been unable to resist the attraction that had already drawn him to Beryl Carolan's side?

"She is the kind of woman," some one had said once in May's hearing, "for whose sake the best and noblest of men will wreck their whole lives;" and May could understand this.

Was Enid, then, wasting her heart on a man who had none to give her?

After a time May said, hesitatingly:

"But, Enid, dear, are you sure—about Lorraine, I mean?"

"Sure that he thinks a great deal too much of Beryl Carolan?" said Enid, almost harshly. "How could I be mistaken?"

A not very self-evident statement; but May did not know how to contradict it. She repeated, however:

"A great deal too much! But, Enid, after all, he—"

"After all!" interposed Enid. "Do you suppose that Beryl is too good?"

"*Enid!*"

May's look of horror and indignation startled the other; she flushed crimson; but she was too angry, too much under the dominion of jealousy, to retract her words.

"Ay," she cried, "I mean what I say! How can a woman lead the life she has led, and leads now, and remain blameless? And Lorraine is not an angel; no man is, if she tempts him—"

"There's no need for that," interrupted May; "any man would fall in love with Beryl, and it's not right or just, Enid, of you to say such things of her—even to think them. You were always her champion, and now you have turned against her because you think she has taken Lorraine from you."

"She *has* taken him from me!" cried Enid, bursting into passionate weeping; and it is so much the more cruel

in her if she does not care for him. Why did she go to him at all? She heard that he was attractive, rich, in a high position, and she meant to have him at her feet. I was foolish to believe in her as I did."

May, who had risen to her feet, stood silent during this outburst. She had no comfort to offer, because she felt that Enid was unjust to Beryl; while, at the same time, she could sympathize with her sister's grief, and for that reason hesitated to hint to her that she had no grounds for assuming that Lorraine had any affection for her. Besides, it is not an easy thing to suggest, even to one's own sister, that she has given her love unsought.

It was a perplexing experience for poor May, who saw what appeared to her a new and unsuspected phase of Enid's character; whereas, it was simply that Enid was influenced by passions to which she had hitherto been a stranger—passions which, of all others, most completely transform the character.

Presently Enid recovered herself somewhat.

"Beryl can not be so cruel," she said, inconsistently, forgetting, apparently, her accusations against Miss Carolan. "She can't know."

"But, Enid—"

May got no further. She wanted to say, "Are you so sure that Lorraine does care for you at all?" but she could not get out the words.

Enid gave no heed to the two spoken. She rose up.

"Never mind, May," she said, pressing her hands to her temples. "Leave me now, dear, and go to bed. You must be tired."

"No," said May, putting her arm round her sister; "I am not tired, and I won't leave you unless you'll promise to try and get some rest. You will make yourself quite ill, and you know that will never do."

Enid shuddered.

"No," she said. "Well, May, I will try. I will, indeed, though I don't think it will be much use."

So May bid her sister an affectionate "good-night," and departed to her own apartment; and Enid kept her word, and tried her best to sleep; but it was broad daylight before she obtained any rest, and then it was the troubled, dream-haunted slumber which is scarcely better than lying awake.

CHAPTER XXIX.

NOT A DREAM, BUT A TRUTH.

“VERE LORRAINE must not marry Enid Roden!”

This was the burden of Bernard Harrington's thoughts as he took his way eastward from Kensington Gore, and even during the service in the church he could not entirely clear his mind of this trouble.

“There is but one course to take,” he said, within himself, “painful though it may be—to him—most cruel; and yet it would be a crime in me to let this go on. Let the result be what it may, I must prevent it. Would that I had known before it was too late, perhaps, to save his peace—and hers.”

Bernard Harrington never hesitated over a duty; once he had said, “This is right,” he went straight forward, without looking to the right or the left.

The following evening, therefore, about nine o'clock, when he judged it possible Lorraine might be at home—moreover, he himself could not get away earlier—he took his way to Albemarle Street and inquired for Mr. Lorraine.

“Yes,” Lorraine's servant replied; but he was afraid his master was engaged.

“Do you mean,” Mr. Harrington asked, “that he has friends with him?”

“No, sir; I think he has some briefs to read.”

“I am very sorry; but will you kindly take up my card, and say my business is very pressing?”

The man went up, and returned quickly.

“Mr. Lorraine will see you, sir. This way, please.”

He conducted Mr. Harrington up a broad flight of stairs, and opened the door of a large and handsomely furnished room.

Lorraine rose from a table, on which lay some legal-looking papers, and advanced with outstretched hand.

“Mr. Harrington,” he said, “I am only too happy to see you. It is a most unexpected pleasure.”

“You are very kind; but I am afraid I interrupt you.”

“Oh! I can read in the small hours; I often do that.”

“It is burning the candle at both ends, Mr. Lorraine.”

“*Qui faire?* Sit here, near the fire, please—it is cold

to-night. You see, one doesn't live in London until the evening."

The other's smile was grave and a little sad. Perhaps his ideas of "living" and Vere Lorraine's hardly coincided. Lorraine resumed his seat; but his keen dark eyes, watching covertly his visitor's face, saw there something which made the younger man ask himself:

"What is this urgent business? is it something concerning me?"

The priest broke the short silence that followed Lorraine's last speech.

"Mr. Lorraine," he said, "I must not detain you longer than I can help; but you will forgive some hesitation on my part, since my errand is a very painful one."

"My time is at your service, Mr. Harrington," said Lorraine, gently, but with an odd feeling of apprehension gripping at his heart. His thoughts flew to Beryl.

"Thank you. I should not have come to you, believe me, were it not that there is no other course open to me."

"What you have to say, then," said Lorraine, bending forward a little, "concerns me?"

"It concerns you very nearly." The speaker's lips quivered. He went on steadily, but his voice shook more than once. "I have no right to question you, Mr. Lorraine, but knowing you to be a man of high honor, I am sure you can not clearly understand your own position, unless, indeed, what I have heard is erroneous."

"What have you heard?" asked Lorraine, quietly; but the grip was tightening round his heart.

"That you are, if not an actual, yet a probable suitor for Enid Roden."

"Enid Roden?" repeated Lorraine, with a quick indrawn breath.

The priest looked at him; but before he could speak, Lorraine had added, quickly:

"And suppose this were so—what then?"

"Because, Mr. Lorraine, you are already married, and your wife is living."

Had Vere Lorraine expected those awful words? Had his own thought, his own ineffable dread, anticipated them? He did not start or exclaim—he did not move at all; but the livid paleness that spread to his very lips—the agony that leaped into his dark eyes—told that the shock

had struck to his very heart; and yet there was nothing of guilt in this stunned silence; it was a man convinced of a terrible fact, which he had feared but doubted; not a man convinced of guilty concealment of that fact, who sat before Bernard Harrington.

Suddenly his whole face and mien changed—he sprung to his feet.

“You know this?” he said through his teeth, his voice hoarse and changed. “How do you know it? Who is my wife? Where is she?”

The priest rose also.

“You have a right,” he said, “to ask those questions, but I can only partly answer them—”

“Stay!” interrupted Lorraine. “I told you when we first met that we had met before; and we *have* met. Are you the priest who performed that wretched marriage?”

“I am. It was a good and lawful marriage in all save this—that you were perhaps scarcely conscious of your acts.”

“And by Heaven!” exclaimed Lorraine, passionately, “it shall be set aside! But the girl—Nina—where is she? In Heaven’s name, who and what is she?”

“That,” said Mr. Harrington, firmly, “I may not tell you.”

“You tell me,” said Lorraine, with sudden and strange calmness, “that I am married, that my wife is living, and you can tell me no more. Are you under a promise?”

“A most solemn promise made to her.”

“She has no wish, then, to claim me?”

“None.”

“Of your own knowledge—she is living?”

“Of my own knowledge. I have seen her.”

Lorraine turned away and sat down, covering his eyes with his hand, and for full five minutes there was utter silence between the two men.

Presently the younger looked up.

“I swear to you,” he said, “before Heaven that I had no clear memory of this marriage. Sometimes I have believed it could only have been a dream; sometimes that some such ceremony actually took place. I know now, from your lips, that my worst fears are resolved into a hideous fact. I am tied by a band that can bind neither heart nor conscience to a woman I have never even con-

sciously seen, whom no power on earth shall ever make me acknowledge as my wife, who does not claim me, yet denies me the power of legally breaking this miserable bond!"

"A moment," said Mr. Harrington. "What she did, she did for your sake, and in error, being very young, and, in consequence, ignorant of many things. She knew that the marriage was a monstrous wrong to you, yet it was that or your life—"

"My life?" cried Lorraine, springing to his feet again. "The man threatened my life—it was he who spoke those words that came back to me one night—'I will put a bullet through your heart!'—answer me!"

"He did. You must have heard them without at the time comprehending them."

Lorraine sunk down once more, covering his face in agony.

The priest went on, earnestly:

"But let poor Nina's training be what it was, her heart at least was noble; she married you to save your life; but she would not claim you to ruin it. I promised her that I would never reveal to you the truth; but I supposed that you would remember the marriage. I did not know at the time to what extent you comprehended what was going on. You repeated the words afterward to me; you placed the ring on her finger—"

"Yes—yes. Oh! great Heaven!—and I thought it a dream—my mother's ring! Yes; go on!"

"From time to time," continued the priest, "I contrived to gather news of you, and as the years went on, and you still remained unmarried, I felt the more certain that you remembered you were not free, but had, of course, no desire to claim this girl, and either did not care to seek her out, or failed in all attempts to do so. But when I heard, first rumors, and then more definite statements about your attentions to Miss Roden, I began to fear—not that you were acting dishonorably, but that you had no clear memory of your marriage, and conceived yourself free to marry again if you chose. Then there was but one course open to me—to tell you at least so much—that the marriage performed in that hut at Barra Creek was binding on you until you could legally nullify it—if indeed this could be done."

Well Lorraine knew the difficulty of nullifying a marriage once performed, though even under circumstances that deprive it of all moral value. He raised his hueless face.

"You yourself," he said, slowly, "could not swear that, at the time you performed the marriage, I was not conscious of my own acts."

"I could not."

Again silence.

Lorraine broke it.

"Mr. Harrington," he said, "I have no right to blame you. You made a solemn promise, and you are bound to keep it until released from it; but I scarcely know yet whether I shall choose to hold myself bound by such a mockery of marriage as this; the girl herself was but a child—herself an unwilling agent. But, Enid Roden! you touch my honor nearly!"

"Your honor!" The priest started. "How? Is it not true that—"

"True that I esteem and admire her, but that I ever dreamed of offering her more than friendship allows—no! If I have seemed to do so—if I have in any way misled her or hers—Heaven forgive me! I have sin enough to answer for, but never the sin of trifling with any woman's heart."

"Mr. Lorraine," said the priest, deeply pained, "I have been grievously mistaken. I own that you seemed to me to take a great deal of pleasure in Miss Roden's society, and it seemed not unlikely that you were growing to love her. I might have spared you what, believing as I did, I felt myself forced to tell you; and yet, if I had delayed—"

"To-day, a month hence, a year hence," said Lorraine, "I could never learn to love Enid Roden. But if I have injured her peace—no! I can not ask you that!" He rose, and began walking up and down the room. By and by he paused again, coming up to the fire-place, where Mr. Harrington stood watching him. "It is better, after all," Lorraine said, "to know the full truth, however harsh and cruel it may be; but this tie can not bind my honor!"

"You can not mean that," said the priest, gently; "you know that it would nullify any marriage you might make."

"I know it," said the other, setting his teeth; "and I would keep back nothing. Well, well," breaking into a

sudden reckless laugh that startled Bernard Harrington far more than anything he had yet seen in this man, "what does it matter to me whether this bushranger's daughter, *my wife*, be living or dead? whether the marriage bind me or not? I have no wish to form another tie; there is no future for me, such as most men look to."

A miserable fear shot into the priest's heart; it flashed into his eyes before the words reached his lips, and Lorraine, catching the look, answered as if the question were spoken.

"No," he said, very low and quietly, with a total change of manner; "not that; there is no entanglement."

"Forgive me; the thought—"

"Ah! you are a man of the world; what else should you think? But," he added, with one of those penetrating looks of which few cared to face, "was it only the natural idea of any man who heard such words as I spoke just now, or any nonsense, any gossip, you have heard, as in this other case—but this time, scandal?"

"Indeed no; the scandal of the West End rarely reaches me in the far East. Whose name—"

He paused abruptly, and sitting down, covered his eyes for a moment.

Lorraine stood still, without speech or movement, waiting for Mr. Harrington to break the silence. He looked up presently.

"I might have thought of that," he said, slowly. "How blind we are, after all! I might have thought—but again pardon. I have no claim on your confidence."

"Speak freely," said Lorraine; "you are the only man I know to whom I would give confidence. Ask me; I will answer you."

"Then, it is this—that you love Beryl Carolan?"

"That I love her?" repeated Lorraine, his dark eyes glowing, his rich voice quivering with that wonderful depth and strength of passion that is so rare, and well, maybe, to be rare, for is it not more often a curse than a blessing? "That I love her?" He stopped, and turned aside. "Ay!" he added, more to himself than to his companion, "she is my very life!"

It was full three minutes before Mr. Harrington spoke again. When he did, his voice was not quite steady.

"Heaven help you!" he said; "for you could not ask

her to share your name, and you surely would not offer—she would not accept less.”

“You deem it madness,” said Lorraine, passionately, “that I should ask Beryl Carolan to be my wife? Be it so. I was mad when I asked her, and I am mad still, for it is her will, not mine, that stands between us; and one day, as there is a Heaven above us, my will shall conquer!”

Few could have doubted this who looked in the man’s face. The priest said, slowly:

“Then she refused you—you have parted from her?”

“Parted? No; nor never will!” He began to pace the room. “Call it sin—peril—what you will, but spare all pains to make me put Beryl Carolan out of my life—I can not do it! She strove with prayers and tears, and I would not yield. I forced from her the promise that we should sometimes meet; and now that I know what I only feared, it can not change my will—it shall not change hers. She is not the less mine for the mockery of marriage that gives me a wife whose very name is unknown to me—whose face, if I saw it now, I should not know.”

Was this only the sophistry of passion? Was it not also eternal justice? Yet there may be danger in the right as well as in the wrong. Mr. Harrington sighed heavily, the more that his own nature was so much in harmony with that of the man who spoke these impassioned words; yet the priest said, gently:

“There is surely peril to a man like you, to a woman like Beryl Carolan, especially, in a relationship which can not end in marriage, which should not end otherwise.”

Lorraine flung himself into a chair, covering his face, his whole frame shaken like a reed by the tempest within him.

“Can men be more than human?” he said, hoarsely. “Can they tear out their hearts by the roots and yet live? Ay, I know the old gamut. So thousands have spoken before me, and thousands will speak after me, and dream of no wrong, yet they have fallen and will fall. Let it be so.” He dropped his hands and rose, his face was livid, and set like a flint. “I sin with open eyes, if sin it be; Heaven judge, not I, for as Heaven hears me, I will *not* part from Beryl Carolan!”

Against such resolve, argument, prayer, reproof would

beat in vain; and Bernard Harrington perhaps felt the un wisdom of attempting any form of remonstrance. His lips moved, but it was not in audible words. He only clasped Lorraine's hand in his in a long, silent, farewell clasp, and turned to the door, and once more Vere Lorraine was alone.

Had the priest, in those few unspoken words, prayed for the man who was rushing on temptation, or were these his words: "Heaven, in Thy mercy, guide him to the truth!"

A strange prayer. What could it mean?

CHAPTER XXX.

MRS. RODEN QUESTIONS MAY.

"MAY," said Mrs. Roden, entering the drawing-room, where May was practicing a new piece, "have you seen Enid since breakfast-time?"

May looked up in surprise.

"No, mamma; she went to her room, I think."

"She is not there now."

"Oh, she may have gone into the gardens. I'll run and find out."

May left the room, and in a few minutes returned.

"She's only out for a stroll, mamma," she said.

"Blanchard" (one of the women-servants) "saw her go out about twenty minutes ago, and cross the road, as if to go to the gardens."

"Very well," said Mrs. Roden; "but I must tell Enid that I don't like her walking about the gardens by herself. What's the matter with her, May? She is not herself at all lately. Sometimes she is in good spirits, and at others depressed and *distracte*. Is she fretting about Lorraine, do you think?"

Mrs. Roden seated herself, evidently prepared for an explanation, which May had no mind to give explicitly. That would be a betrayal of Enid's confidence; but some reply, of course, she must make, so, after a pause she said, hesitatingly:

"I fancy Enid does worry herself. I don't know, but it seems to me—"

"You don't know *what*? *What* seems to you?" said Mrs. Roden, impatiently; "my dear girl, you are enigmatical."

"Well, mamma, I hardly know how to say what I mean: I mean—I am not at all sure that Mr. Lorraine does care for Enid."

"What makes you say this, May?"

Mrs. Roden's tone and manner were not encouraging.

"Oh, several things, mamma," replied May; "of course I may be wrong; only if Enid is wasting her affection on a man who does not give her any in return—"

Again she stopped.

Mrs. Roden asked:

"Have you heard or seen anything that gives you this impression, May? If you have, I think you ought to tell me."

"I *have* heard something, mamma," said May, flushing; "but I can't tell you, because it was told to me in confidence."

"Something about Lorraine?"

"Y—yes."

"Do you mean any scandal?" said Mrs. Roden, half afraid of the answer.

"Not exactly that, mamma, but that he was fond of some one else."

"Beryl Carolan?"

"Yes—Beryl Carolan."

Mrs. Roden rose.

"I can scarcely believe that," she said, "of Vere Lorraine; he could not for a moment think of making Miss Carolan his wife, and the world must necessarily put its own interpretation on any 'friendship' between a man like Lorraine and a woman like Beryl. If he is trifling with Enid—"

"Oh, mamma!"

"My dear May, you know little of the kind of thing men of the world think nothing of. Still, I repeat, I am not willing to believe Vere Lorraine capable of paying attention to one woman while he was in love with another, and that other woman he can not marry."

"But, mamma," cried May, "*has* he paid attention to Enid?"

"Something very like it," said Mrs. Roden, sharply but vaguely; "and if he meant nothing he should have acted differently. But no doubt Beryl Carolan has exerted her influence to win him, and has succeeded only too well."

And with those words, to which May vouchsafed no reply, having no mind to raise a storm, Mrs. Roden quitted the room.

Had Enid gone for a stroll in Kensington Gardens?

After leaving the house she crossed the road, and walked quickly eastward, glancing about her nervously, as women are apt to do who are not used to going about the streets by themselves; but presently she paused and looked right and left. Her heart beat fast; her cheek now flushed, now paled.

Should she draw back even now from the step she was about to take? Was it not mad, unmaidenly? But while she hesitated a hansom cab-driver, alert for a fare, saw her standing irresolute, and drew up.

"Hansom?" he asked, interrogatively.

Enid looked up. The chance decided her. She put her foot on the step and got into the cab.

"Hanover Square," she said to the driver. "I will tell you when to stop."

And cabby drove off.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A STRANGE INTERVIEW.

"ENID RODEN!" repeated Beryl to herself, with an amazement which she did not show when a servant handed her Enid's card. Then, aloud: "Have you shown Miss Roden into the drawing-room?"

"Yes, miss."

The man withdrew, and Beryl rose, laying aside the book she had been reading.

"Enid Roden—here!" she said again to herself. "What can she want with me? It can not be about the jewels!—is it about Lorraine? Impossible!"

She went, however, to the drawing-room, but paused a moment before entering.

It was painful, after all that had happened, to meet Enid, who had once been her friend, whom Beryl, so tenacious of affection—alas! for her—still loved. But the girl was quickly mistress of herself, and opened the door.

Enid rose from a chair at the further end of the room, advanced a few steps hesitatingly, and paused, flushing

crimson. Beryl, who had not even changed color, bowed her head slightly, and advanced with graceful, nonchalant ease.

“Good-morning, Miss Roden,” she said; “I am at your service. I presume you called on business. Will you sit down?”

This address did not relieve Enid’s embarrassment. She had come here on a mad, impetuous impulse; but now that she was actually face to face with her rival—so, in her heart, she called Beryl Carolan—she knew not what to say or how to act.

Beryl’s calm ease of manner, her quiet ignoring of her visitor’s manifest agitation, of there being anything to excite surprise in the visit itself, threw the whole burden of opening the subject of that visit upon Enid herself, and Enid did not feel now as if she could say a word; but, on the other hand, having come, how could she get away without accounting for her presence?

She sat down, and as Beryl looked at her steadily, a softer shade stole over her beautiful face. She was reading Enid like an open book, and she pitied her. She would come to the rescue, and give her some-time friend an opening.

“I wondered,” she said, gently, “when I saw your card what could have brought you here. If it is anything that I can do for you—”

Enid turned to the speaker, stretching out her hand.

“You can do something for me if you will!” she cried, impulsively. “Will you do it?”

But Beryl ignored the extended hand, and replied, almost coldly:

“I never pledge myself to an unknown obligation. I can not understand in what way I can serve you *now*. You and I are as far apart to-day as if oceans rolled between us. My world is no longer yours; it would be a pity that any one you know should even see you entering this house.”

Had not the same thought crossed Enid? She colored deeply, but answered at once:

“As to that, let people think what they choose. You know that long ago, if I could, Beryl—”

“Stop!” interrupted Beryl. “There is no use in going back to the past. I know that for a time your generosity

forbid you to condemn me as the rest of the world condemned me. You would have kept up the friendship between us; but that, of course, was impossible. In justice to you—not because my feeling toward you was changed—I was compelled to ignore your wishes; but I was, and am, deeply grateful to you. Now, however, the wish no longer exists. I don't blame you, but be just to me."

"I *am* just to you!" cried Enid; "if I can't feel quite as I used to do, it is not for anything the world says or thinks of you—it is because—because—"

"Because—what?"

Enid burst into tears—half grief, half-jealous anger.

"Oh! Beryl—can't you see—don't you know—you *must* know!"

Beryl rose to her feet.

"Yes," she said, very quietly; "I do see—I do know—I will not any more feign ignorance of your errand this morning. You think that I am your rival—that I am robbing you of Vere Lorraine's love!"

Enid started violently, and covered her burning face with her hands.

"How could I think anything else," she said, "after what I saw?"

"What did you see?"

"You were together—in a carriage—in the Strand—" began Enid, and paused.

"Well," said Beryl, with a short, bitter laugh, "did you imagine it was *his* carriage?"

"No—no, Beryl; but I saw his face—he was talking to you, and I felt sure then—that—he loved you!"

What a thrill went through the heart of the woman who heard those words! But she drew a step nearer to the other, and paused.

"And you!" she said, under her breath; "you love him?"

"Yes," in a low, shamed tone; "I love him!"

"And you have come to me to-day," said Beryl, slowly, "to ask me to give him up to you—to remind me—is it not the old story?—that I have so many worshipers, while you care only for the love of this one man—that I only seek conquest—that all are alike to me—only they must all kneel at my feet, and own themselves vanquished—can

not I forego this one conquest—can not I yield up this one man to you?”

“Beryl,” said Enid, in a kind of fear, “how strangely you talk.”

“Do I? But have I not hit the truth? That is the point; never mind how I reached it.”

“It is partly the truth,” said Enid.

“That is something gained. Then—I am to give up Vere Lorraine to you. Why?”

Enid’s head drooped lower.

“I told you, Beryl.”

“You told me,” said Beryl, sinking back again into a low chair from which she had risen, leaning back, and clasping her hands behind her head—“you told me that you loved him—not that he loved you!”

The tone, the manner, the words—something of conscious power in the nonchalant attitude—the glorious beauty of the girl who seemed to hold sway with so easy a grasp, stung Enid to fury. She sprung to her feet.

“It is you who came between us!” she said, trembling with agitation. “You were bent on conquering him from the beginning. Why did you go to him? You knew your power, and you meant to use it—you meant to win him, and for what? He could not make you his wife—”

Enid stopped, half choking; but it did not seem as if the other would have interrupted her if she had gone on for an hour.

Beryl did not move, or display any emotion at words that might have stabbed her like a knife, coming, too, from lips that had once professed devoted love to her. She sat in the same careless, graceful pose, staring at Enid with a kind of sleepy curiosity in her violet eyes, as one would watch the tantrums of a child, at once ludicrous and impotent. But when Enid stopped, she said, slowly:

“Well? I am listening. Go on.”

“You are cruel!” burst out Enid, half beside herself; indeed, she had scarcely known what she said. “You are miserably cruel!”

“Am I? I have a sort of idea that I might retort. Perhaps you did not mean all you implied, Miss Roden; perhaps you did. You have told me that I am either a heartless flirt, who loves conquest for conquest’s sake—or what some people think I am. Vere Lorraine can not

marry me—but—he is—my lover! I might resent such an imputation, but I suppose I have lost the right to do that. I am more concerned to wonder how, on either of these two suppositions, you should imagine there was any good in appealing to me to give you back what I have robbed from you. If I am a mere coquette, you might as well appeal to the generosity of a wax figure as to mine; if Vere Lorraine is my lover, my self-interest would certainly outweigh my heart; of course I leave out all question of my own feelings being concerned—they are, admittedly, *non est*."

Enid Roden had no weapon in her memory to meet this kind of thing. She did not understand it; she could not reply to it; it crushed her more effectually than any outburst of passion of indignation could have done.

Sarcasm is a potent force against those who have no capacity to retort in kind.

Enid flung herself down in the chair, repeating again, with a broken sob:

"You are cruel! cruel! unjust!"

"Unjust!" Beryl laughed. "That is a new charge, Miss Roden. How am I unjust—tell me?"

Enid was more on her own ground now. She looked up.

"Was it just to take from me what was everything to me and nothing to you?"

"Was it ever yours? Stay!"—Beryl abandoned her careless manner and tone and bent forward, her hands lightly interlaced round her knee—"let us drop all beating about the bush and understand each other clearly. You have come here to me to-day to accuse me of stealing from you a love that was yours, to ask me to give you back that love. Now, answer me—what right have you to believe that Vere Lorraine held you dearer than a friend?"

Enid colored scarlet and turned aside.

"Many things," she said, after a pause, falteringly—"many things. One can feel better than name the ways by which one understands that—that—"

She paused, and Beryl did not come to her relief. She maintained a pained silence. How could she say to this girl that her own heart had deceived her, that she was imagining attentions which had never been given—never intended?

Perhaps Enid scarcely deserved such consideration from

Beryl Carolan, but Beryl's generous nature pitied rather than condemned her some-time friend; and her cynical wisdom made her more merciful in regard to the insults leveled at herself than might otherwise have been the case.

She broke the silence at length, speaking very gently:

"Let that rest for awhile, Miss Roden. I will not dispute that you believed Vere Lorraine looked upon you as something more than a friend. But you accused me of deliberately setting myself to win him from you. You surely do not maintain that when I went to him to ask him to undertake my defense, he was in any way other than a friend to you?"

"No; not then."

"Then, even supposing I had so unwomanly an intention, I was at least free, so far as you were concerned. From that time you and I were parted, and I could not even know all that went on in your world. If I did, where was your prior claim?—save, perhaps, in this—that Lorraine could not marry me, and so (for his happiness) I was under an obligation to consider yours. I ought to give him up to a woman he could make his wife."

"Would not that be reason enough, Beryl?"

A strange smile flitted over the other's lips.

"What sublime heroism one is capable of by proxy!" she said. "Were the cases reversed, would you give up Vere Lorraine to me?"

Enid's cheek burned, her bosom heaved.

"Do you love him?" she said, suddenly, looking straight into the other's eyes.

The violet eyes met the brown ones without flinching—bore them down—and never a change of color in the pale cheek, never a quiver of the firm lips.

"What is that to you?" then said Beryl, coolly. "Vere Lorraine came here of his own free will. I did not ask him; I did not go to him with any thought of winning his love; and if he loves me, what then? If you think he has wronged you, challenge him—not me."

"You do not deny that he loves you?" cried Enid, rising once more.

"Deny it—" Beryl began, and paused.

Her whole manner changed. She rose, and laying a gentle but firm hand on Enid's shoulder, put her back in

the chair again; then, still standing by the girl's side, but not facing her, her hand still on Enid's shoulder, she said:

"Enid, for the sake of your own peace, give up all thought of Vere Lorraine. He does not love you; he never loved you. If he has given you cause to think he might ever come to you as a lover, it was unwittingly done; he is incapable of trifling with a woman's heart. Though I love him with my whole soul"—her voice trembled as she spoke—"I would have given him up to you, Enid, for his dear sake, for I can never be his wife; and, oh! Enid, you will surely believe that he would not ask, nor I accept, less; but he gave his heart to me; and is he a man to love lightly? Will he turn to you because his love for me is hopeless?"

Enid had bowed her head down, and was weeping convulsively in grief, and shame, and passionate resentment; and Beryl, feeling the last, removed the touch from which Enid shrunk, and turned away. The truth was too cruel for any comfort to be of avail, save what time should bring; and Enid was scarcely in a mood to accept comfort from her rival. So Beryl left her to regain at least some outward self-control, and presently Enid had mastered herself somewhat, and rose.

"I have been miserably mistaken," she said, "miserably deceived; but it is just as well that my eyes are opened."

"Mistaken," said Beryl, gently, "not deceived. You wrong Vere Lorraine by the suggestion that he played with your feelings, or was even careless of them."

"I might be wrong in thinking the first—not the last," said Enid, coldly; "and I admit that I was unjust to you. Forgive me for that—forgive me for coming to you. I was mad; I scarcely knew what I did."

"You need not ask my forgiveness, Enid. I would that I could have spared you this suffering; and so much I am sure you know, that what has passed will rest between you and me."

"Beryl, I know it."

She moved toward the door.

"Good-bye," she said, pausing.

"Good-bye," Beryl said in a low tone, and opened the door. "I will go with you myself," she said.

She followed Enid down to the hall door and opened it,

and then once more Enid paused and looked at the woman she had once so loved—the woman Vere Lorraine loved—whose glorious beauty was at once his excuse and a wound to her rival.

“She is so lovely, and he loves her!”

It was the death-blow of all hope to look on a creature so formed to win, who said, without words:

“Who can contend against me?”

Enid’s momentary impulse to offer her hand was checked. Her face hardened; she turned away, and saying once more “Good-bye,” passed out.

Beryl went back slowly to the room she had left, and sat long with her face hidden in her hands; and then the door opened softly, unheeded by her, and some one said, “Beryl,” and she started up with a smothered cry, and threw herself into her lover’s arms. But when he questioned her about what her trouble was, she would not tell him. It was nothing, she said, that she could tell any one, for it was another person’s secret, and Lorraine questioned no more. He had happened to be close by on business, he said, and snatched a few minutes to come in and see Beryl; and she clung to him as if in “boding fear.”

“You love me, Vere?” she said; “you will always love me?”

And he answered, pressing her closer to him:

“Always, dearest;” and, under breath: “Heaven help me always!”

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PINK AMETHYSTS.

“VERE,” said Emilie Gresham, meeting her cousin one evening at the theater, “I am making up a party for Easter for Silver Ash; if you can possibly come, you must.”

“I shall be only too delighted, my dear, and I dare say I shall be able to come. You may be quite sure I shall do my best.”

Emilie went on her way to a box with a party of friends, Lorraine to the stalls with the lady he was escorting, the handsome wife of a brother Q. C. In the row before them sat Herbert Gresham and Rowcliffe. By and by two people entered a stage-box and took their places, a young Frenchman, who looked like an actor, and a girl in pale

pink satin and cream plush—Beryl Carolan, as every one knew, and of course every one stared.

Presently, when the first act of the piece was over, Gresham quitted the stalls, and made his way round to Beryl's box.

She shook hands with him, smiling, and let him sit down by her in the corner; but when a few commonplaces had passed, she turned to him and said, very low:

"Did you know that your wife was in front? She is in an opposite box."

"My wife!" He started, and glanced across; his cheek flushed. "No," he said, "indeed I did not know it."

"So," Beryl said, smiling a little, "you must not stay here long."

"Don't banish me yet, Beryl," said Gresham, earnestly.

"Hush! I must—soon!" She looked across at Emilie, and added: "What lovely pink amethysts she is wearing!"

The flush on Gresham's cheek deepened, his eyes flashed, but he said, with a carelessness that did not deceive Beryl:

"Yes, they are very handsome."

She turned and looked at him; there were tears in her eyes; his sunk.

"I know," she said, softly, and her hand just touched his, no more.

"It was your doing, Beryl," whispered the man, hoarsely.

She was silent; her heart was too full for words. Surely he had not merely followed a fleeting impulse; surely there was hope, good hope, that Emilie's day of renewed happiness was dawning at last.

Beryl dismissed Gresham shortly afterward, and he obeyed her behest meekly.

The play was over and the spectators poured out into the street. Herbert Gresham went out among the first and waited in the porch, standing back in the shadow, waiting for whom? Not for Beryl, for he saw her pass, leaning on Anatole Marceau's arm, and made no effort to speak to her. He saw Vere Lorraine go out with his companion, and almost immediately came a group, among which Emilie walked, leaning on the arm of a man not even known by sight to Emilie's husband.

A pang of jealousy shot through the man's heart, a feeling that he should have been where this man was, and then

came a thrill of pleasure as a movement of Emilie's pushed aside her mantle, and Gresham's eyes caught a flash of pink amethysts. Did she wear them for his sake? Did she love him still? She was not happy; there was a sadness even in the smile with which she replied to some remark of her cavalier's.

Gresham had almost obeyed the impulse that seized him to rush forward, push this intruder away, draw his wife's hand on his own arm, and lead her to her carriage; but being an Englishman, and not a Frenchman, he checked the impulse, and only watched his wife until she had disappeared within her carriage, and then he turned and walked moodily away. He felt as if he were an outcast, shut out from happiness that might be his, that had once been his, and he had madly sacrificed it. He had not cared once; a month ago he would not have called it happiness; but now he was saying words he would not have believed his lips could ever utter.

"I was mad—I have wrecked my life; she can never forgive me, not even though she loves me. It is too late now."

And then he was sure he loved Beryl Carolan, or he said he was sure, which is not quite the same thing as being so, though it often passes muster for a time, as guilt passes for gold, till the test is applied.

And Emilie, though she had not seen her husband in the porch of the theater, had seen him in front, and watched him keenly, remembering what Lorraine had told her. Yes, there was a change; slight it might be outwardly, but it was there. She saw him go to Beryl's box, and that Beryl dismissed him, and she whispered in her heart:

"There is hope; yes, there is hope; and Beryl Carolan is true and loyal. Heaven reward her!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHY DID HE WANT TO KNOW?

THOUGH Enid bore up bravely under the crushing blow she had received, yet she could not hide from those about her that a great change had come over her life, and coupling this with Lorraine's continued absence from the house—also he had twice excused himself from invitations—Mrs. Roden could not fail to divine something of the truth,

and arrived—naturally—at the most uncharitable conclusion.

It was the fact, then, and Enid had somehow discovered it, that there was “some kind of entanglement” between Lorraine and Beryl Carolan.

To May Enid had said merely that she knew Lorraine did not love her, and wished never to have the matter alluded to.

“Don’t let mamma question me,” she said; “I can’t bear it. Tell her what you please, but she must let me alone.”

And Mrs. Roden opened fire upon May.

“Surely,” she said, “you have Enid’s confidence. Some reason there must be why Lorraine does not come here any more. What is it?”

“A very simple one, mamma,” replied May, “though you would not listen to me when I hinted at it before. Something Enid has told me, but not all, and she begs that you will not question her.”

“I can not see her failing and not know the cause, May. What is it?”

“That Lorraine does not care for her—never did—and she knows it—now.”

“She told you this?”

“Yes.”

“Then he has trifled with her, May—”

“No,” May interrupted, “he has not. Dear Enid, you know, was always inclined to be sentimental, and exaggerates every one else’s feelings as she does her own. Mr. Lorraine is sympathetic, and Enid mistook sympathy for love. Perhaps Emmie hinted to him that he was unknowingly disturbing Enid’s peace, and that is why he keeps away.”

“Or it is on account of Beryl Carolan.”

“I think perhaps he is in love with her,” said May, “and no wonder—but that is all.”

“Who told you that was all?” asked Mrs. Roden, rising from her chair.

“No one. Only that I believe in both Lorraine and Beryl.”

“I admire your faith, May, and I wish that I could share it; but I know the world and human nature” (she knew little enough of the last), “and I can not be so

credulous. It was an evil day for us when Beryl Carolan entered our house."

And with those words she left the room. May had not attempted a reply. She was a judicious young woman, and knew it would be worse than useless to vindicate any one against whom her mother had taken a prejudice, or to deny that two and two made six, if Mrs. Roden had decided upon this startling arithmetical fact.

At this very time Beryl had just finished a new song which had come in, and was about to commence another, when the door opened, and Harwood hobbled into the room.

"Anything good?" he said, sitting down on the sofa.

He knew no more of music than did his own crutches.

"Yes, pretty," the girl answered. "Do you want me?"

"Well, I do partly. Say, Beryl, what are you up to with Gresh? He doesn't come here as often as he used."

"That's his business."

"No," with an execration; "it's mine, too, I think, and I'll bet it's your doing. It won't pay, girl, I tell you, *it won't pay*. The other's infernally risky when all's said and done. This is a far safer game."

"Well," she said, "there are plenty besides Gresham."

"It won't do," repeated Harwood.

He saw that Beryl was beginning to look "dangerous," and so modified his tone, and the next moment shelved off to something else.

"What's this about an Easter party at Silver Ash, Beryl—Mrs. Gresham's place?"

"Who told you of it?" returned Beryl, watching him covertly.

"Why, Standish; he's one of the *invités*. He said Vere Lorraine was going there."

"Yes? And who else?"

"I don't know. The Rodens, eh?"

"I haven't heard so, and I don't think it is likely."

"Why not? Emilie Gresham is very chummy with the girls, isn't she? Ah! by the bye, some one told me that the eldest was rather sweet on handsome Lorraine, and I suppose he doesn't see it. Well, it wouldn't do if there's any hitch of that sort to have 'em staying in the same house, and Lorraine would, of course, be first favorite with his cousin. What has become of Hazlemere? Not that

he was much good—too poor—nothing to stake, and nothing to pay with if he lost.”

“Then you need not trouble about his defection, Justin. Now I want to practice.”

And she returned to the piano.

Silver Ash, Emilie Gresham's country house, stood a little way from the village, or, rather, hamlet, of Studmore, in Berkshire, and one day there came to the village a peddler who made himself very agreeable in the village ale-house, and asked a number of questions—though no one supposed he did—about Silver Ash and its inhabitants, and their habits.

He did not resume his road until nightfall, and then he went on to Reading, the road leading past Silver Ash.

Whether a man who, hidden by the darkness, prowled for more than an hour about the grounds of Silver Ash, and made a complete circuit of the house, was this peddler, who could say, for no one saw him.

But the peddler did not go to Reading; he stopped at a village half-way, and when he lay down to sleep, he said to himself:

“To-morrow I will go up to the house and have a talk with the maids.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HAZLEMERE IS PUZZLED.

“LOVE me, love my dog,” will certainly read, and is often made to read, in reverse order; and this truth Ulric Hazlemere soon found to his cost. While Vere Lorraine was in high favor in Kensington Gore, the painter was always made welcome, and though he did not come as a suitor to May, and was not recognized as such, yet he not unnaturally concluded, since his visits were not discouraged, that May's parents would consider their daughter's happiness if it should become involved.

Calling one day, however, shortly after the last recorded interview between May and her mother, he found a change in the domestic atmosphere; May was the same to him, but Enid seemed *distracted*, and Mrs. Roden was certainly cold. He was puzzled and perplexed. Was he mistaken? he asked himself.

He spoke by chance of Lorraine, and found that he had

made a mistake. Enid colored; Mrs. Roden froze; Mr. Roden, who was present, drew himself up, and, looking at the ceiling, remarked that they "had not seen Mr. Lorraine lately," and May looked startled.

"What on earth does it all mean?" said Hazlemere to himself, as he walked home that evening. "What has Lorraine done? Am I suffering through him, or has Papa Roden taken fright? It's too late anyhow if he has. I don't mean to give May up, and I'm sure she is not quite indifferent to me. But I must see Lorraine—there's some mystery here!"

He went up to Albemarle Street the next evening, and was told Lorraine was at home. Hazlemere needed no announcement; he went straight upstairs and knocked at the door of Vere's room.

"Come in," said the clear, soft voice of the owner, and in walked Hazlemere.

Lorraine rose, tossing aside a book, and holding out his hand.

"Why, Hazlemere," he said, "delighted to see you. Sit down, old fellow!"

"I don't disturb you, Lorraine?"

"Disturb me? I was reading a novel. I would far sooner have a talk with you."

"Then the novel must have been a very trashy one, I'm afraid," said Hazlemere, sitting down.

Lorraine threw himself into a fauteuil opposite, and replied:

"No; it was one of Paul Heyse's, and a very good one. Well, old man, what's the matter?"

Hazlemere stared.

"By Jove! Lorraine," he said, "you'd see through a brick wall. If I were up to any mischief, I'd keep clear of you. How did you know there was anything the matter?"

The other smiled.

"Oh, I can see," he said. "Go ahead, Ulric."

"It's about the Rodens," said Hazlemere.

Lorraine did not change countenance.

"I can't make them out. Have you done anything to offend them, Vere?"

"What makes you think I have?"

"Well, I called there yesterday and they didn't treat me

as they used to—they were always so friendly; but yesterday they seemed stiffish, all except May, and I was mightily puzzled. Then I happened to speak of you, and I saw that I had put my foot in it—that puzzled me more than ever; and old Roden said, quite primly, they hadn't seen you lately."

"I am afraid they are offended," said Lorraine, quietly; "but I hope they will not make you suffer. You are my friend, but you are not myself; and having practically encouraged your visits, it would be hard and unjust to ostracize you now."

"But you, Lorraine," began Hazlemere—then stopped and whistled—"what an idiot I am," he added—"they think—"

"They think, Hazlemere," said Lorraine, in the same manner, "that is, I judge from what you say, Mr. and Mrs. Roden think I have trifled with Enid. You know me better. I never thought of her except as a friend. I liked her, admired her—but nothing more; but I was told that my visits were misinterpreted by *le père et la mère*, and so I went no more. They asked me once or twice, and I made excuses. So I suppose they saw how matters were. I am deeply grieved, and maybe I have been to blame—"

"No, no, Lorraine," interrupted his friend; "that I am certain you have not. Don't reproach yourself. I've been there often enough, goodness knows, and I never had any idea you were taken with Enid; you treated her as you did May."

"Heaven knows!" said Lorraine. "I had no thought I could be misunderstood."

"You would if you were a vainer man, Vere."

Lorraine rose abruptly, and crossed the room.

"Don't hint at that, Hazlemere," he said, huskily.

"It is not just to her."

"I didn't mean to pain you," said Hazlemere, gently; "but I think it is so—you know very well you've lots of women in love with you—the wonder would be if they weren't! Why shouldn't Enid Roden be like others?"

Lorraine did not answer for a moment; then he came back, and flung himself into the fauteuil again.

"I hope you are wrong, Ulric," he said, "for I must have given her cause—unwittingly—but still, I could not stand conscience-clear."

"I have told you before, Lorraine," said his friend, "that you were too sensitive for a lawyer. You have no sort of right in this case to make yourself out in fault, though you are trying to shield, even to your own heart, a woman who has made a mistake—a mistake for which I can never see why women are to be blamed. If a handsome, attractive fellow comes in their way, they only follow human nature in getting to fall in love with him. Showing it is another thing."

"Yet a high-minded woman, Ulric, always shrinks from the idea of giving her love unsought. Still, with you, while I admire her for that feeling, I do not blame her as she blames herself. But the thought that one may have injured a woman's peace must be cruel to a man not a coxcomb or a heartless flirt!"

"I know it, Vere. All I say is—you are in no fault."

"I hope not," said the other. "But of yourself now! Surely they can not be so unjust as to punish you for my sins because you are my friend?"

"I don't know; they are certainly changed. I don't know what to make of it. I hardly like to go to the house."

"I will find out how matters stand from Emmie," said Lorraine, "and if she can help you I know she will."

Hazlemere's brow cleared.

"Thanks!" he said. "I know what you can do, and Mrs. Gresham is the dearest little woman living. You told me a week ago you thought her husband was beginning to turn over a new leaf."

"He is trying hard, Hazlemere. There is considerable change in him already. I keep touch of his doings, and he is—at present—a different man from what he was even two months ago. The thing is—will he persevere—and I think he will."

"That is a great deal for you to say, Lorraine. You have not much faith in human nature."

"Not much. How should I have? But remember, Gresham has never really ceased to love his wife. Bad as he was—believing, too, that he cared nothing for her—he did care, and the old root is sending forth shoots again."

"He seemed entirely infatuated with Beryl Carolan—as I was so near being," he added in a lower tone.

Lorraine's dark eyes flashed.

"But you," he said, slowly, "have found safe anchorage?"

"Thank Heaven—yes! And Gresham?"

"If his wife forgives him, Ulric, he will owe it to Beryl Carolan!"

Hazlemere started, and bent forward eagerly.

"Lorraine, you mean that she—"

"I mean that she has used her influence over him as only a pure-hearted, noble woman would use it; and that Gresham yielded to such influence showed me, more than anything else could have shown me, how much good there was under all the dross of his character."

"A pure-hearted, noble woman indeed!" said the painter, fervently; "but, Vere, I could never, somehow, think her otherwise. Despite her surroundings—despite the mystery surrounding her past life—many things that seemed against her, she herself, her look, her manner, the indefinable something that can not be mistaken, bore the impress of what she was. Why, standing there alone, with no creature to protect her, but rather the reverse—with her wonderful beauty—and fair butt, it would seem, for insult, she compels the respect of the *roués* who are, for the most part, her guests. I am not saying all this for your sake, Lorraine, but because I feel it—I might say, I know it."

"No, Hazlemere," said Vere Lorraine, "you are a friend of the true metal, who may keep silence to spare a wound, but will never speak falsely. For my sake! Well, why should I hide the truth from you?—it is only that invincible reserve of mine, and perhaps—because—there seems now—so little hope."

"She loves you, then, Vere?"

"Ay, she loves me—and for the rest—Heaven knows!"

"And Heaven help you, Lorraine! You see her still sometimes?"

"Yes—how else could I endure my life?" returned Lorraine, passionately. "She would have had us part forever—she refused to be my wife—but I would not accept total banishment—I could not—I made her yield to me in that."

Hazlemere was silent. What could he say? He knew that with a man of Lorraine's temperament no other solution was possible; he knew that Lorraine had not resigned

his claim. Would it end in victory for him? It must end so, unless another and even more terrible solution were found; but such a marriage would be a social disaster for Vere Lorraine.

Yet Beryl's sublime self-sacrifice in refusing her lover's prayer only showed her the more worthy of the position and the happiness she deliberately put from her for his sake, and would only strengthen—if that were needed—his determination to conquer hers.

How could he, besides, endure to see the woman he loved and justly honored continuing in a position so equivocal; her name the butt of any one who chose to levy slander at it; she herself compelled to receive men whose very presence was almost an insult to her—who might consider themselves justified in offering her actual insult! But, said Hazlemere, inwardly, the pity on't—oh, the pity on't! that Vere Lorraine should have given his love to Beryl Carolan.

When Lorraine spoke again—for a silence of some moments followed his last words—it was of other things; and Hazlemere, understanding that his friend wished to put that subject aside, took the cue, and made no further allusion to Beryl.

But on his way home he mused sorrowfully on what he had heard, though it was no more than he had expected.

"I knew it would come to this," he said to himself, "when he told me that day he *must* go to Hanover Street. I'm afraid it had pretty well come to it then. To such a man as Lorraine recoil is impossible when a certain point is past. I could draw back in time; but his is a deeper, more fiery nature than mine. I doubt if, for him, there is an 'in time' in such a case. And to be loved by such a woman! Well, I was wise. I should have wasted my heart in vain. My bonny May is better suited to me, and I think she is of the same opinion. I wonder how long I shall be able to keep from asking her if I am right?"

The remainder of Mr. Hazlemere's musings were decidedly chaotic, and could not easily be recorded in intelligible language, even were they worth recording, which no one who has been in love, and can look back calmly on his own lunacy, would imagine they were.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MR. RODEN SPEAKS.

"I DON'T think we ought to encourage young Hazlemere to come so often," said Mr. Roden, standing before the fire in the breakfast-room one morning; for, though early in April, the weather was chilly.

Enid and May had quitted the room, and Mrs. Roden was just finishing a letter.

So abruptly and *à propos* of nothing in particular was the above remark delivered, that the lady looked up startled.

"Yes," she said, vaguely. "But what made you think of it just now, Sydney?"

"It isn't the first time, my dear. The fellow has no money. I don't intend that May shall marry a poor artist."

Mrs. Roden laid down her letter and prepared for a campaign. She had visited upon Ulric Hazlemere the supposed sins of his friend Lorraine, but her husband was taking up new ground, and she was by no means sure of yielding it to him.

"I think he likes May," she began, diplomatically, feeling her way.

"Naturally enough; and no doubt he likes the *dot*" (Mr. Roden pronounced this word "dott") "which she will receive."

"Be just to him, Sydney," said his wife. "I don't believe that of young Hazlemere for a minute. I think he would have spoken to May before this, if they had been on equal terms."

"Then it isn't honorable in him," retorted Mr. Roden, "to be dangling about a girl he can't ask to be his wife. Of course one can't actually snub him, but he should not be encouraged."

"The last includes the first," said Mrs. Roden. "I own I have not felt very cordial to him, on account of Vere Lorraine; but if May's feelings are engaged—"

"She must get over such nonsense, my dear. Young women of twenty don't break their hearts for anybody. May could do much better—very much better."

"But we should have thought of all this before, Sydney; and as to breaking hearts, I don't know. It would be very hard," said Mrs. Roden, and her voice broke a little, "if both our children should be made unhappy."

"May won't be unhappy," said Mr. Roden, testily, because he knew he was in the wrong. "At any rate, I must ask you not to encourage Hazlemere—don't invite him; and when he calls, let him understand that he can come as a friend, and nothing more."

"I am afraid," replied Mrs. Roden, coldly, as she rose, "that it is too late for such tactics. You can not throw young people together, Sydney, or allow them to be together, and put your own limits on the extent of their feelings for one another."

She was accustomed to rule in the house, of which Mr. Roden's headship was more nominal than actual, and she had no intention of yielding to this new departure on the part of her husband, unless it squared with her own views.

Indeed, Mr. Roden's move was a lucky one for Ulric Hazlemere; for, whereas Mrs. Roden had been inclined of late to "frown upon Jamie," not because he was poor, but because he was Vere Lorraine's friend, her husband's *ipse dixit* aroused her opposition and inclined her to favor the young artist. She knew, as an old diplomatist, that if she once gave up her leadership on an important point, she would have a severe struggle for supremacy in the future.

A woman who means to rule should yield to the man in small things, never in great ones.

Mr. Roden turned sharply, as his wife, evidently considering the discussion closed, moved toward the door.

"What do you mean, Grace," he demanded, "that you shall encourage young Hazlemere?"

"I mean, Sydney," she answered, "that I, as hostess, must use my own discretion in regard to my guests."

"Your guests—yes. But this is not a question of guests."

"Pardon me, it is. Mr. Hazlemere has done nothing to justify us in looking upon him overtly as a suitor to May. When he does so, it will be time enough to interfere."

"When it is too late."

Mrs. Roden smiled.

"It may be too late now, Sydney; but I repeat, that at

present Mr. Hazlemere is only a visitor, whom we have hitherto received cordially, and to turn round upon him suddenly, without any just reason, and practically snub him, would be both cruel and ill-bred."

"Very well!" cried the M. P., angrily, "do as you like. ("I intend to," aside from Mrs. Roden). "But I tell you, May sha'n't marry that fellow!"

To this the Roden *mère* gave no reply. She quietly went out of the room, leaving her husband with the last word—a privilege more often claimed and exercised by men than they choose to admit.

When Hazlemere, not easily daunted, called that afternoon, Mrs. Roden received him quite in her old manner, and he, not knowing the under-currents that had wrought this change, wondered while he rejoiced.

"I thought," he said in a low tone to May, as they stood apart, both apparently intent on admiring a tropical plant, which neither knew anything about, and cared still less—"that is, I was afraid I had in some way offended your mother."

"Were you?" said May, innocently. "Why?"

"She seemed so cold to me last time I called."

"Oh, that must have been your fancy!" said May, bending very low over a brilliant, scentless bloom.

"It wasn't my fancy, and—forgive me—you know it wasn't, Miss Roden; but she is as kind as ever to-day, and so, perhaps—"

"So perhaps," said May, archly, and it must have been the reflection of the flower that made her cheeks so rosy, "it was your fancy after all."

"Have it your own way," replied Hazlemere. "I don't mind how often you contradict me."

"You are very meek."

"Am I? You see it is a pleasure even to be contradicted by you. No! don't go away, please," for May turned from the plant; "we haven't half admired this tropical—what d'ye call it—have we?"

"I really don't know its name," said May. "Enid is the botanist; but it's very handsome, isn't it?"

"Yes, very," said Hazlemere, with remarkable earnestness, considering that he thought it hideous. And they admired the flower for the next ten minutes—that is, they

remained standing by it; and Hazlemere really felt grateful to the scarlet thing with the prickly leaves.

Perhaps even May conceived a certain affection for the plant, though she would not have owned it for worlds.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

“WE CAN NOT PART.”

MORAL courage is a virtue in which men are notoriously deficient. Vere Lorraine was, however, one of the few exceptions to a rule; yet even he shrunk from the stern, inevitable duty of telling Beryl Carolan the grim truth, that might cause her to insist on entire separation.

His marriage, when he had spoken to her of the past, was an uncertainty; his wife (if wife she was) might be, probably was, dead. The marriage itself was, as likely as not — considering all the circumstances — a sham; very possibly the whole affair was, as Lorraine tried to hope, a dream or a vision.

But now he knew the truth; now there was not more room for doubt; he had a wife, and she still lived. He was bound not to keep this from Beryl. What would her decision be?

For more than a week he had not seen Beryl, and he felt that he must see her soon; yet to tell her this miserable truth—how could he do it?

“I am a coward!” he muttered to himself one evening. “Why not go to-night; I may be able to see her alone before any one else comes.”

Having made the resolve, he was not the man to go back from it. He went out, and hailed a hansom, and was driven off to Hanover Street.

He was shown into the drawing-room, and found it untenanted. But perhaps there might be guests at dinner, and he would have no opportunity of seeing Beryl alone.

He was not long left in suspense. In three minutes the door opened; and Beryl, in picturesque robes of silver satin, and coral, and red velvet, came in.

She said not a word, but threw herself into her lover's open arms, and clung to him as surely only a woman can cling whose heart, but for this one love, is desolate, whose life knows no other sunshine but this.

"My treasure!" said Lorraine, at last, lifting her beautiful face to his, that he might feast his eyes upon it. "How could I stay so long away from you? Beryl, can I see you alone for a little while?"

"Yes, Vere; we are alone this evening until ten o'clock. Justin is never in the room earlier than that; besides, he knows you are here."

"It was cowardice kept me away, Beryl," Lorraine said, as she drew him to a seat, placing herself on a stool at his feet.

The girl leaned her golden head back against him, and looked up in his face wistfully.

"What do you mean?" she asked, softly.

He winced under the gaze, but drew her closer to him as he answered, steadily:

"There was something I had to tell you, and I lacked the courage, Beryl."

"But you lack it no longer, Vere; tell it to me now."

He turned his face from her, and spoke the next words with an effort:

"My one hope is lost to me, Beryl. My marriage was no figment, but a fact; and my wife is living."

A start—a kind of shiver went through Beryl; otherwise she did not move.

"How do you know this?" she asked, with a strange quietness. "Tell me all, Vere."

So Lorraine repeated what had passed between him and Bernard Harrington, Beryl listening in silence, and with her head bent down; nor did she speak when the miserable story was finished.

Lorraine bent down to her.

"Beryl," he said, passionately, "tell me—I can not endure suspense—you will not let this part us—you will not send me away from you?"

For a moment the girl held her breath; then she lifted her head, and her eyes met his full.

He bent over her again, answering that look, and his lips met hers.

"My darling," he said, when he could speak, "you are indeed good to me!"

"Don't call me good," the girl said, tremulously; "for it is I that am cowardly! Oh, Vere, I could not send you quite away from me—now!"

A perilous confession to make; but even in such a moment, Beryl Carolan would not have made it if her instinct had not told her truly the man who heard that confession so "binding sweet" was incapable of taking advantage of it. If his eyes flashed and his cheek glowed, it was with no emotion that could threaten her peace or his honor. He folded her to his breast, not being able to speak in the tumult of passionate joy that filled his heart.

He had so dreaded this interview; and now Beryl's lips had bidden him stay, by the admission that she had no strength to banish him from her side.

What must the end be? Perhaps neither of them had any thought of the future in these first minutes "molten through with bliss." But by and by Lorraine spoke very low, but resolutely:

"I shall not submit," he said, "to the yoke of a marriage which is no more than a mockery. I will find Nina."

"Find her," said Beryl; "but how?"

"I shall try to trace her from Barra Creek."

"A hopeless quest, Vere; it was ten years ago. You have no idea where to seek her—whether she is in England or abroad; and if you found her—"

She paused.

"If I found her, Beryl, I would do my utmost to have the marriage declared null."

"Then you would be free," Beryl said, slowly, "and then?"

He put his trembling lips to her brow.

"Darling!" he whispered, "you know."

The girl's heart beat fast; she had to struggle for self-control before she could answer her lover.

"Yes, I know," she said; "but, oh, Vere, it can never be—it never shall be!"

"Beryl, you can not resist me forever; sooner or later, you must yield."

The flush on her cheek faded into deathly paleness.

"No," she said, under her breath, "I will die first!"

Lorraine, too, was white to the very lips; his resolve was as strong as her own.

"You will live," he said, "and live to be my wife!"

When the final strife came, which would conquer?

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ABOUT SILVER ASH.

"WE go down to Silver Ash just before Easter," said Emilie Gresham, "and that is just upon us now. Father Bernard, I know you can't come down at Easter, but can't you give us a few days after it?"

It was Sunday evening. Vere Lorraine had accompanied his cousin to St. Eanswythe's to evensong, and they had afterward gone to the clergy-house to have supper with Mr. Harrington.

Supper was over, and the trio were seated round the fire.

"I am sure," added Emilie, eagerly, "the rest and country air would do you a world of good; you are looking fagged—isn't he, Vere?"

The priest smiled.

"You are very—very kind," he said; "and, indeed, if I can arrange matters here, I shall be only too happy to accept your invitation. A young friend of mine is coming up to town at Easter, and if he will take duty for me for a few days, I shall be able to come down. Whom does your party consist of?"

"Vere, for one; Mr. Malleson, a very clever author, for another; then there's Mrs. Bennett, my husband's cousin; Lord Charles Welby, Lila Campbell, and Marcia Dene—all nice people. I shall count on you, Mr. Harrington. I won't let you off."

"I will promise tentatively. I can't do more than that."

"You'll have to content yourself with that, Em," said her cousin, smiling.

"I suppose I must," said Emilie; "but I shall never forgive Father Bernard if he fails me."

Before Mr. Harrington could answer, the door opened and his servant appeared.

"If you please, sir, there's a poor woman wants to see you for a few minutes."

The priest rose at once.

"Excuse me," he said to his guests, and quitted the room.

Lorraine turned to his cousin.

"Emmie," he said, "you wanted to have asked the Rodens to Silver Ash. You spoke about it a month ago."

"Yes; but yesterday isn't to-day. I couldn't ask Enid. You see, with you and May, without Enid—that would never do. It would look so marked."

"Of course, my dear; but what I meant is— Ask them, and I can easily form some reason for not being able to go down."

"What!" cried Emilie; "give you up for them? Certainly not. I am very fond of them all, Vere; but, of course, I love you ever so much more. I won't hear of such a transposition."

"You're a dear little soul!" said he, taking her hand for a moment in his own. "Very well; I must say no more; only I did not want to be the cause of depriving you of your friends' society."

"That can't be helped, Vere. It's a choice between two, and I prefer you. I wonder, too, what the other guests would say? I don't think either Mrs. Bennett or Marcia Dene would care to come if you were to be *non est*."

"Ah," said Lorraine, "one can flirt safely with Mrs. Bennett, since she has a husband; but Marcia Dene—no!"

"She's awfully pretty, though, Vere. Don't you think so?"

"Yes. What then? It would be nothing to me, you know, coz, if she had the beauty of Helen. It's no use your trying to make up matches for me, Em."

"No; I don't think it is," replied Mrs. Gresham, sorrowfully. "I wish it was."

"I don't, my dear."

"But then, I can't see it as you do, Vere. Tell me, is it true that—I mean—you love Beryl Carolan beyond recall?"

"Or I should not love her at all, Emmie. You know me well enough for that."

"But, Vere, you can not make her your wife."

"Then no other woman shall be," he said, quietly.

"If this cloud that hangs over her could be lifted," said Emmie, almost in a whisper; "if she could be proved innocent of that robbery—"

"Yet, even without such proof, I would marry her—if it were possible."

“She refuses?”

“She refuses—yes.”

Once more the door opened and Mr. Harrington re-entered the room, and then general things were talked about until Emmie and Lorraine took their leave and traveled westward.

If Mrs. Gresham had accepted her cousin's resignation—if, by those or any other means, Vere Lorraine had not gone to Silver Ash that Easter—how different might his future have been!

His fate—and not his fate alone—was decided by an invitation to stay a few days at a country house.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FROM HUSBAND TO WIFE.

“BERYL, tell me; do you think that I may, that I dare write to my wife, and ask if there is any hope of her one day forgiving me?”

So Herbert Gresham asked his “better angel,” laying his hand on hers, as he sat by her side.

He had come to seek her counsel and help; he would not take this momentous step in his life without her advice and sanction.

It was strange and pathetic to see this man, experienced in the world, who had tasted deep of its pleasures, who had sinned heavily, and lived years of selfish recklessness, clinging to, depending on, a woman—almost a girl in years—making her the arbiter of his fate; trembling between hope and fear in a crisis of his existence, as to what her fiat might be, ready to yield instant obedience if she should disappoint his hope and confirm his fear.

Beryl Carolan felt the pathos, and fully realized the responsibility of a position simply impossible to any but a woman endowed with very remarkable attributes; but she felt no elation, no touch of ignoble pleasure in her absolute influence over Herbert Gresham. Her happiness was entirely unalloyed; and surely there can be no purer happiness than the knowledge of having saved a man or a woman from moral ruin. She was too high-minded—even had it not been unnecessary—to put her power to the fullest test, by asking: “If I say do not write yet, what then?” She knew what her final answer to Gresham's

question would be, and she gave it at once, straightforwardly and simply.

"Yes," she said, gently; "write to her—why not?"

"Ah! Beryl," Gresham began, eagerly; then paused; "why not?" he added, in an altered tone; "a thousand reasons—why not. I don't feel as if I were fit to ever look her in the face again."

"Yet," said Beryl, in the same manner, "a man can do no more than repent and make restitution. You have wronged your wife bitterly; but she loves you, and love can forgive."

"Can it forgive so much?" he asked, his voice trembling.

"It has no limit," answered Beryl; "at least, a woman's love has none. Write; I think you will not meet with a rebuff."

"If I do I shall deserve it," said Gresham in a low voice. "Ah! Beryl, I scarcely dare to venture, I so dread failure—"

"And if you failed," said Beryl, slowly, "if you met with a rebuff, what would you do?"

He started and flushed, and for a minute sat quite still; then he turned his face full to hers.

"What would you have me do?" he said.

"Do you mean that as I should advise, so you would act?"

"As you should command, Beryl."

"Then I would say, go on in the nobler life you have begun; you deserve the punishment, accept it. You have burned your boats behind you; there is no going back to the old degraded life; and if you gave it up only to win back happiness, that is no giving up at all. I knew you did not do that; I know you will be true to yourself in the future, whatever may happen."

"Heaven bless you, Beryl!" He pressed his lips to her hand. "Yes, I will be true to myself, and to you. Ah! you need not fear; I shall always love you; how could I do otherwise? But my love is worship; it could not, even in thought, wrong you."

"I know it," she said, gently. "I do not fear; and I shall always love you as my dearest, most valued friend—"

"You will, Beryl? you will so really think of me?"

"Else I had not said it. Though I can seldom or never see you—"

"Stay, Beryl! what do you mean?"

"I mean," she said, quietly, "that when you are at home again, you must not come here any more."

"Not come here!—never to see you!" cried Gresham. "Oh! Beryl, Emilie could not ask this. To you she would owe everything; she could not, if she doubted me, doubt you!"

"You are a man of the world," said Beryl, "and you must know that I am right. Your wife could not come to my house, therefore you must not. You can not ask too much of her; moreover, the world would recognize no such friendship as yours and mine."

"But it is hard—cruel!" he said, covering his face. "You are my better angel, Beryl. I don't feel as if I could go on without your help."

"You will have your wife's help," said Beryl.

"Yes; but I want yours, too!" he answered, taking her hand in his.

She did not withdraw it, though there might have seemed some cause to fear that the old passion was resuming its sway. But Beryl had no such fear; if she had had it she would still have acted as she did now; to show distrust might have done the very mischief dreaded.

"You forget now," she said, after a pause, "that you will soon cease to miss me—"

"Beryl, Beryl—never, never!"

"An old cry with all of us," said the girl, half sad—how much wiser were her twenty-five years than his thirty-eight!—"and we learn in time to smile at it."

"Not with women like you, Beryl."

Here Herbert Gresham was right, and Beryl was silent—she spoke generally, and so speaking was right; but she had not thought of the deception that proves the rule, the individual application had escaped her; but Gresham's words only strengthened her resolve, if that were needed; if her magnetism were indeed so strong, how long could she rely upon his maintaining the present relations existing between them? There must be no counter-attraction to his wife. So Beryl, though she spoke gently, spoke firmly.

"It is for your own sake," she said, "and it is a matter of right."

"Since it is your wish," Gresham answered, "I must submit; but I will hope, I can not help that, that one day the barrier may be broken down; that Emilie will welcome you as a friend."

A faint color crossed Beryl's cheek, habitually so pale that even so slight a change of hue was marked. She averted her head.

"No," she said, very quietly, "I don't think that can ever be; best not to think of it or hope for it."

"Why not hope? I want her to love you, Beryl."

"To love me?" She almost smiled, the idea seemed so strange. "That might have been once, not now. You seem to have forgotten that, besides the taint of this place which hangs about my name, I am still morally guilty of theft."

"Beryl, you are not—not to me!"

"Not to you, because you wish to believe me innocent; but to the world at large."

"But Emilie—" began Gresham, impetuously.

"Emilie," said Beryl, taking him up, "whether her own opinion acquitted me or not, could not receive, could not visit a practically convicted thief, and the presiding genius of Justin Harwood's *salon*. Between her and me there is a great gulf, and she could not pass it if she would; I would not if I could. I don't rail at the world—the world is, in the main, just to me. We can not treat some of the principal unwritten canons as heresies and not suffer pains and penalties."

So bitterly true, and yet, in her case, so cruel! Gresham only covered his face and was silent. When Beryl spoke again, it was in an altered tone.

"Write to your wife," she said, softly, "and when you hear from her, come and see me again, and tell me the tenor of her answer, if you will."

"If I will! Have you not a right, Beryl, to know all?"

"No right; only the privilege of deepest sympathy."

"The right," said Gresham, rising, "of the noblest generosity; in every way you have saved me from myself. Perhaps you can not believe me—why should you?—when I say that, whatever happens, I can never be again what I have been for years, the mere thought of you and of my wife would keep me from it—and it was you who taught me to know that I still loved her."

Beryl's eyes were full of tears; her lips trembled; she could not speak at first, but when Gresham bent his head and kissed the hand he had taken again in his, she said, almost in a whisper:

"You have given me something better than happiness. Heaven prosper you! Remember she wore the jewels you sent her!"

So Herbert Gresham left her; and a few hours later a letter was put into Emilie's hand, which made all the blood in her body rush to her heart, and for a few moments she was as one numb to all sensation save this mad, wild throbbing of joy, seeing nothing but the characters before her, the handwriting "so well, so dearly known," which her eyes had so long ached to see, and now they beheld: and the sight was more beautiful than the dawn after the weary night of watching.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"AS YOUR OWN HEART DICTATES."

"You sent for me, Emilie?"

Even as he said these words, Lorraine half divined what had happened from the radiant face his cousin raised to him as she came forward. He smiled as he stooped to kiss her.

"Come here and sit by me, Vere." She was trembling; her cheek was flushed; her eyes shining. Lorraine obeyed her, and then she drew out a letter, and put it in his hand. "You may read it," she said—"only you."

He read the letter carefully, and lifted his eyes to hers—her eyes were blind with tears.

"Vere," she said, impulsively, "what am I to do?"

"What does your own heart dictate, Emmie?"

"My own heart says 'come,' " she answered; "but I might be wrong, and I know you could not be."

"My sweet, trusting little sister!" He clasped her hand closely in his. "No, Emmie, your heart is right this time. Follow it!"

"Oh! Vere, Vere, you have made me so happy!"

She burst into tears, weeping for very joy, and Lorraine drew her within his arms, and let her weep out her happiness on his breast, and when she grew calmer he talked with her of her husband.

Emmie felt as if her tongue could "wag on that theme forever," and he did not grow weary of it because she did not; his was essentially the sympathetic nature which feels not only *for* but *with* others.

But by and by Emmie said, after a moment's pause:

"I have been very egotistical all this time, Vere—talking only of myself and my own happiness."

"And so—of mine, Emmie, dear!"

"Because you are so loving, so generous, Vere! But I must speak to you now of something—of some one else."

"Do you mean of Beryl?"

"Yes! Ah! Vere, I owe all to her. I must go to her—I must thank her myself!"

A quick flush crossed the man's cheek, his eyes glowed; but he shook his head.

"I doubt if she would see you, Emmie," he said. "She does not see any cause for your gratitude, and she is very proud."

"Too proud to let me clasp her hand and tell her how deeply grateful I am to her? Of course, she would not own to having done noble deeds—people capable of such things are just those who take them as an every-day matter; but I can not feel so—can not act so."

"As you will, Emmie—again, your own heart must guide you. Heaven bless you, dear!"

Emmie put her hand into his.

"Vere," she said, softly, "it is very, very hard, that this woman, so noble, so blameless, can never be your wife—forgive me!"

"Forgive *you*, Emmie, who never speak save in love?" he said, hoarsely. "But my sorrow must not cloud your happiness."

"Must it *not*, Vere? You are too dear to me for me to feel quite happy when you are not!"

Lorraine pressed her hand reverently, remaining silent for a few minutes.

Presently he said in a low voice:

"I have asked her to be my wife, Emmie, but she—refused—for my sake."

"Vere!—but you could not?"

"Could not? By Heaven, I would!—and one day *I will!*"

"But," said Emilie, earnestly, "think of the suspicion that hangs over her."

"I think of 'nothing, Emmie—only that I love her, and that she is spotless—far more than worthy of all the worship I lavish on her."

And to this, what could Emilie answer?

Love and prudence are seldom close friends, and though Lorraine presented an extreme instance of that fact, he was none the more open to any argument in favor of prudence.

So Emilie was wise in her generation, and held her peace; but while she admired Beryl Carolan the more for her self-abnegation, she said within herself:

"I am glad, in one way, that she has made the sacrifice; but since Lorraine still sees her, he will, sooner or later, win the battle."

CHAPTER XL.

WHAT THE QUID NUNCS SAID.

"So they've made it up again," said Rowcliffe, in the smoking-room of the Athenian. "Gresh has turned over a new leaf—become quite a good boy!"

"Turned over a new leaf?" exclaimed Lord Charles Welby. "Turned over a new volume, you mean—run into vol. three."

"Ah!" put in Malleeson. "Vol. i.—good boy; vol. ii.—*very* naughty boy; vol. iii.—extra good boy—is that it?"

The others laughed.

Delves, who was one of the group, said, with a shrug:

"How long will it last?"

"Who'd be rash enough to prophesy?" remarked Rowcliffe. "But, you know, he was awfully in love with *la belle* Carolan, and she wouldn't look at him."

"He took it with a good grace, though," observed Standish, "for he still went to Hanover Street, and talked of Beryl Carolan as if she were an angel."

"So she is!" from all.

"Yes! I mean that he seemed to look upon her as if she were a tutelary saint."

"And so she was, I believe!" said Malleeson. "I rather fancy Gresh owed his reconciliation with his wife to Beryl Carolan."

"Did he?" said Rowcliffe. "Well, I should know she'd never listen to him if he made love to her; but one would hardly have expected the kind of thing you speak of from Hanover Street—seems rather good for her to go in for reforming naughty boys."

"I don't see it!" said Malleeson, rather dryly. "If she had her way, that *salon* wouldn't exist, I know."

"That's right enough," said Delves. "Do you notice, too, that she never touches the cards herself?"

"And often stops the young ones from playing," added Standish.

"I can't make out her putting up with the whole thing!" said Malleeson; "and I'd lay anything Harwood doesn't always play fair."

"Think he's a Greek?" asked Rowcliffe.

"H'm! I won't go up so far as that; and, mind you, he is honestly skillful. Never saw such a whist-player, and I know something about the game. And euchre! he'd beat a California ranchman, which is saying something. Still, when all allowances are made, I'm sure there's something more."

"But supposing that is so," said Standish, "you don't think Beryl knows it?"

"She must suspect it, I imagine. Even if she knew it, it wouldn't be more inexplicable than her being where she is at all."

"She can't help herself, maybe," said Welby.

"Nonsense, man! She could go on the stage any day and make a fortune with her beauty, and her knowledge to back it up. She has acted already in Italy, you know."

"So I heard; and the diamond robbery and its consequent notoriety would be advantages rather than drawbacks."

"I should think so. By the way, handsome Lorraine still goes to Hanover Street, though seldom to the *salon*. The Rodens have cut him."

"Or he them. Which is it?"

"Well, I don't know. Some say they think it's not all square in regard to Beryl Carolan, and the Rodens don't admire that; some, that Enid admired Lorraine too much, and he didn't see it; so, finding a mistake was made, he held aloof."

"They are not coming down to Silver Ash," said Mal-

leson, "and Lorraine is; so, evidently, there's some split between them; and Mrs. Gresham, of course, prefers him to them."

"Moreover, the ladies wouldn't forgive her for sacrificing him," said Rowcliffe; "though it's not much good their troubling about him. His some-time client has made all the running."

"When does the party meet?" asked Delves.

"Next week, my boy—just after Easter. We're to have a parson among us for two or three days, so we must be on our good behavior."

"And I suppose Gresh won't play cards now," cried young Welby, laughing.

"We can try him. I dare say the old Adam isn't quite extinguished in him," remarked Rowcliffe. "As for Lorraine, he never was a card-player. He'll sit all night and play chess, and vote cards a 'bore.' That's a kind of thing I can't understand."

"Doesn't follow it's an enigma, though," said Malleson, rising. "Ta-ta, dear boys! I'm off to a *matinée*."

"I pity you!" cried two or three.

"No, you don't; you envy me. I'm going with Beryl Carolan!" And with this parting shot, Malleson took himself off.

CHAPTER XLI.

"I WILL WATCH HIM."

"YOU'RE cutting your own throat and mine too," said Justin Harwood, abruptly, and with characteristic elegance of simile.

They were seated at luncheon, a meal seldom without guests; but to-day, for a wonder, they were alone. Something had been said by Harwood about Lorraine, and Beryl replied carelessly; then suddenly, without any preliminary, and apparently *à propos* of nothing, Harwood made the above remark; but Beryl knew only too well what he meant.

"I am doing you no harm," she said. "The harm to you would be if I did what you seem to want of me."

"Would it? Do you suppose I wouldn't have my share of his money? I'm worth buying, and I'd turn up this place, and a good deal, if not all, the other business; it's

pretty risky. And here you're always standing in my light. You made Gresh turn it up, and others you try to set against the play."

"I won't stand by and see you rook them out of everything!" said Beryl.

"Well, then, you'll have to!" was the rough answer; "or I'll be even with you in some other way. I'll get the money, anyhow."

"What money?" asked Beryl, coolly; but her eyes grew covertly watchful.

Harwood laughed.

"Oh, I was speaking generally," he said.

As if he could deceive Beryl!

"If you meant Lorraine's money," she said, "I don't see how you are going to get it."

"I didn't mean Lorraine's. I was speaking generally, I tell you."

"Not you, Justin. However, it isn't worth words. The other business is risky, and I advise you to drop it."

"Dare say. You never liked it."

"Liked it?" she laughed. "As if I liked anything you do! But I wasn't speaking of likes and dislikes; I meant danger. 'The pitcher that goes often to the well comes back broken at last.'"

"Bah! I don't believe in proverbs; and no one can suspect—"

He stopped significantly.

"Unless you are taken red-handed."

"I don't mean to be."

"So they all say. I only warn you."

"If I am taken," said Justin, "I'll split."

"I know you will. Do you imagine I have any other reason, save one, for warning you?"

"No, I don't. What is the other reason?"

"On account of the Rodens."

"Bah! you owe them nothing. They turned round upon you as soon as you were under a cloud."

"It was such a very thick cloud!" said Beryl, rising. "People in society can't associate with thieves and the queens of such *salons* as yours."

"You're forgiving!" with a sneer.

"No; only philosophical."

"Your philosophy isn't worth much," said Harwood;

“for it only teaches you to bear the evils of the world, not to accept its benefits.”

“Meaning—Lorraine?”

“Yes; meaning Lorraine. Of course I stand in the way. Now, I’ll make a proposition—a handsome one, I take it.”

“Let me hear it,” said Beryl, indifferently.

“This: Lorraine wants to marry you—good! If a thing’s worth having, it’s worth paying for—good again! I’ve told you I’m getting a bit tired of risk. Let Lorraine pay me off with a good round sum—he can afford it, and he’d well-nigh beggar himself for you, I know—and I’ll levant and live honest ever afterward.”

Beryl looked at the brazen-faced speaker, not in surprise—nothing would surprise her in Justin Harwood, except a spark of honesty, good feeling, or refinement—but with a kind of bitter amusement.

“You are speaking seriously?” she said, at last.

“Never was more serious in my life.”

“And you think that, in the first place, I would propose such a monstrous idea to any man; and that, in the second, I would trust you?”

“Trust me? Why the” (elegant expletive) “not, girl?”

“Rather, why? You couldn’t keep honest for three months, Justin. The ruling passion is too strong in you. You can’t contradict me from experience, for you never tried.”

“I’d like a new experience,” said Harwood, with a coarse laugh.

“And you would soon weary of it. No; drop the subject. My own name would disgrace a man, without the help of yours.”

“As you please,” said Harwood, with a black look; “but, all the same—”

He left the sentence unfinished; and Beryl, not seeming to notice this, quitted the room.

But she did notice it, as she noticed everything; and just now she was especially suspicious of her step-father.

“I know what he is planning,” she said to herself when she was alone; “but he shall never accomplish his purpose. He has had it in his mind ever since he knew Emilie Gresham was going to Silver Ash, and Vere was to

be her guest. When he left London, a little while ago, nothing came of it. He was down at Strudmore, reconnoitering. Never mind; I know how to use his tools, and I can be even with him. Haven't I practiced the 'art'—unknown to him—lest I should one day need it? I may need it now, Heaven knows!"

She paced her *boudoir* slowly, still musing.

"If only I could get into the house! But that is impossible. How could I disguise past recognition—*his* recognition, if no one else's? No; the only way is to watch Justin closely, and follow him. He thinks I suspect nothing. He shall think so. Let him make *this* attempt, and, at whatever cost, I will prevent it!"

CHAPTER XLII.

EMILIE'S LETTER.

THINKING the matter over, Emilie Gresham decided that perhaps it would be best for her not to call in Hanover Street; but why should Beryl not call on her?

She wrote to the girl a loving, grateful letter, begging her to come.

"I want," said Emilie, "to thank you face to face for all you have done for me, though I can never thank you enough. Pray—pray, don't refuse me!"

But Beryl, though she sobbed passionately over that letter, did refuse. She had done nothing, she said, to merit thanks. She was grateful to Mrs. Gresham for asking her to call, but it was impossible.

"It would not be just to you that I should come. Your generosity, your imagined obligation to me, make you forget that I no longer belong to your world, nor can ever belong to it again. But you can never fully know how precious to me is the thought that one good and noble woman judges me less harshly than, perhaps, from my surroundings, I deserve."

When Emilie, her eyes full of tears, gave that letter to Lorraine to read, he only said, as he returned it to her:

"I knew she would answer you so."

"And must I let it rest then, Vere?"

"For the present, I think so—yes."

Half an hour later he was in Beryl's presence, holding her in his arms. He had come to bid her good-bye before going down to Silver Ash.

"And why did you write as you did to Emmie?" he said, softly, caressing the golden head that rested against him.

The girl started.

"Did she show you the letter?" she asked.

"Yes. You did not mind, Beryl?"

"No, only that it pained you; but how else could I have answered her?"

"I hardly know; you might have gone to her."

"Would you have done so, in my place, Vere?"

He had no reply for that; he strained her to his heart in silence.

When he spoke again, it was of his impending departure.

"I shall count the days, Beryl," he said, "until I see you again. You will write to me, dearest, promise me!"

"Yes, Vere."

"And may I write to you?"

"Ah, yes!"

So at last they parted; and neither dreamed how different from anything they had contemplated their next meeting would be—neither dreamed that the shuttle had gone for the last time through the web of their lives.

Would the thread so woven in finish a complete whole; or, tangle and breaking, ruin the web forever?

CHAPTER XLIII.

STUDIO SUNDAY.

It happened this year that Studio Sunday and Palm Sunday were one and the same, and Ulric Hazlemere's studio, among others, was thrown open, prominent among the attractions being the portrait of May Roden. That portrait was destined to be a lucky one for its painter.

Beryl Carolan had received an invitation from Hazlemere, and at first she hesitated about going. The Rodens were sure to be there; perhaps also Emilie Gresham and her husband; and in the small space of a studio it was impossible to avoid meeting these people face to face. Might not the Rodens, at any rate, be offended with Hazlemere

for asking her to come? Then a haughty, reckless spirit seized the girl.

"Why should I not go?" she said to herself. "I have done no wrong. There will be people there I know; I want to see the pictures. I shall not speak to the Rodens; and Mrs. Gresham, how will she treat me?"

She dressed herself in her favorite plush—it was a kind of steel-blue this time; the graceful hat, plumed with cream and blue feathers—and drove down to West Kensington.

The studio was already crowded with the usual gathering of *dilettanti*, press critics, fashionable people who talked art jargon without knowing anything about art, and genuine art-lovers; eyeglasses, spectacles, "long hair and oddity," and extraordinary costumes among the women, were in the ascendant; and the tongues were going fast and furious.

The entrance of Beryl Carolan, who came alone, created an instant diversion. Everybody stared; those who knew her personally pressed forward to speak to her; those who didn't, and those who wouldn't know her, talked about her, and admired her beauty and her dress.

Beryl had at once seen that the three people she did not wish to meet were in the room; Emilie standing before a landscape, and Enid and May sitting apart, talking with a celebrated painter and his eccentric wife. Hazlemere greeted her warmly.

"How good of you to come!" he said. "I was so afraid you would be engaged, and there are three people here dying for introductions, to say nothing of my pleasure."

Beryl laughed.

"And *the* portrait?" she asked, archly, and in an undertone.

Hazlemere colored, but his eyes lighted up.

"Well, I am ashamed to repeat," he said, "the flattering opinions I have heard; I don't mean from noodles, but from competent critics. I want your opinion so much; you haven't seen it since it was completed."

"My opinion, after all the competent critics?"

"I consider you one of them. No, I am not flattering—it isn't in my line."

"I know you are not; but I must needs feel flattered by your thinking so much of my critical powers."

She moved onward toward the portrait; the three people who were dying for introductions, two of them painters, the third a musical celebrity, were all made happy, and Beryl reigned the unwilling but inevitable queen of an admiring circle.

"If I could only," Emilie murmured to herself, "get close to her and say one word—even give her a look."

But this was not easy. Beryl was always surrounded, and though, if she had intended to speak apart to any one, she would certainly have done so, dismissing her train without more ado, she did not so choose; she had no intention of giving Emilie the desired opportunity.

Everybody was talking of the portrait; those who understood led the van; the rest followed the bell-wether. When the critic of the "Weekly Review," who wrote also for the "Banner," said it would be the best portrait in the Academy, it was manifestly safe to echo the remark, without stopping to inquire whether the critic had seen all the other portraits destined to smile, smirk, or frown on the walls of Burlington House.

"'Tis really a picture, Miss Carolan," said a painter who never did portraits, and therefore could speak without personal bias; "have you seen it yet?"

"I am trying to see it," she answered; "I hear great things of it; the subject was inspiring."

"Yes; Miss May Roden is very charming. Ah! if you would give Hazlemere sittings, Miss Carolan; but I am afraid—"

"That *I* shouldn't be equal to the boredom of sitting for my portrait for about the twentieth time," interrupted Beryl, gravely.

"That is not what I was going to say."

"No; but it's what I mean. Now, here is an opening."

She stood some minutes looking at the picture, and then turned to Hazlemere, who had approached.

"It is a portrait," she said, "because it is a perfect likeness—not idealized—simply true. You seem to have caught the face in every mood, not only in one; but it is a picture really—I don't think you have ever painted one so beautiful!"

"Thanks!" said the painter in a low tone, too deeply moved to say more.

He knew the value of Beryl's cultivated opinion, from

an artistic point of view; but it touched him in other ways. A man can perhaps never be wholly indifferent to the praise of a beautiful woman, and to this woman Hazlemere had almost surrendered his peace. He had escaped in time; but such an experience leaves an after-glow in a man's heart. Even the woman he has nearly, though not quite loved, can never be to him the same as all other women—there is a certain consecration about her—a reflection of “the light that never was on land or sea.”

So of all the praise he had heard that day, Beryl's was the most prized—the most cherished by Ulric Hazlemere.

Beryl understood him, and said no more; but after one more look at the portrait, one stifled sigh that the original could never be her friend again, turned away to another picture, and doing so, found herself face to face with Emilie Gresham.

It was but a look from each to each—words were impossible—they were in a crowd—a whisper would have been overheard—but if ever a woman's eyes said, “From my soul I thank you!” Emmie's eyes said it then; the blood rushed for a moment to Beryl's pale cheek; her violet eyes drooped, her lips trembled; but she mastered herself, and passed on, her heart throbbing as if it would break—break with the longing to be able to lay her head on that other woman's breast, and sob out there all the bitterness of her life.

Can any man realize what it is to a woman—this exile from the society of the pure and good of her own sex—hard at times to bear for those whose own acts have put them under the ban; but oh! how cruel for the woman who has done no wrong—who suffers only because appearances are against her. Upon Beryl Carolan the unmerited punishment fell with special force, for she had not even become inured by long use to the life she led now. Only a few months ago she had been the darling of a society that now ignored her—the close friend of women who would now scarcely own they had ever known her; and yet, in heart and soul, in thought, word, and deed, she was unchanged—she was the same Beryl into whose ear Enid Roden had poured all her troubles—whom May admired and loved; but the scene had revolved, and carried her round with it—suspicion clouded her name; her back-

ground to-day was a gambling *salon*, no woman's figures save her own on the stage; she had passed from Mayfair into Bohemia, and in Bohemia she must remain.

Beryl did not remain long in the Melbury Road; she had other studios to visit, and in any case would have withdrawn within an hour, but a certain pride—the pride that had induced her to come—made her stay long enough to refute any impression that she felt on account of the Rodens.

Enid breathed more freely when she had gone, and several other women were not sorry to be rid of the brilliant presence that so entirely eclipsed their own, and caused the eyes and thoughts of usually faithful swains to wander sadly.

Just before the Rodens were going, Hazlemere contrived to get May to himself for a minute or two.

"You don't know how happy it makes me," he said in a low voice, "that it is your portrait which has brought me this success!"

"I am very—very glad of the success," replied May, looking down and ignoring the first part of the sentence.

"Who should be, if you are not?" whispered Hazlemere.

It was a bold venture, and brought the rose-flush to May's cheeks; but of course she had no answer for it—what answer could she have?

She looked round for Enid and Emilie, but they were not to be seen.

"You're not angry with me?" said Hazlemere.

"Angry? oh, no! We must be going now, Mr. Hazlemere."

"So soon?"

"We have been here a long time."

"It doesn't seem so to me; and I have hardly spoken to you. Well, if it must be, good-bye."

May gave him her hand. She did not seem to mind that he held it nearly half a minute, or complain, even to herself, that her rings were crushed into her fingers. She bore the pain with martyr-like resignation.

Nor did Hazlemere feel offended because she did not say good-bye in reply to his, and scarcely looked at him. On the contrary, he was highly gratified by conduct, which, under ordinary circumstances, would have been ill-bred.

Time had been, not so long ago, when Studio Sunday in

Melbury Road did not find its way into the papers, or obtained a slight notice; but this time the press had a good deal to say about the portrait of Miss Roden, and other pictures too, though the portrait led; and in art circles there was a great deal of talk about Ulric Hazlemere and his future.

“That fellow will be famous one of these days, Roden,” said a fellow M. P., alluding to the young painter. “The portrait of your daughter May is a decided hit—haven’t seen such a charming work for a long time—no chalky work there—no smudging—and expression—pose—exquisite!”

Benevolent M. P.! though he did not know it.

Mr. Roden was gratified through his family pride, for was it not *his* daughter whose portrait was thus lauded, and would certainly obtain a place on the line in the forthcoming Academy? And then, it looked as if he had befriended the struggling artist, though, of course, he had done nothing of the kind.

“I am so glad you like the picture,” he said. “I always said Hazlemere had talent, and I gave him the commission, confident that he would fulfill my expectations.”

His hearer happened to have heard who was the real *deus ex machina* in this case; he also knew that Sydney Roden’s acquaintance with art was about on a par with his acquaintance with astronomy; therefore the M. P. laughed unto himself, but kept his own counsel, and privately called Roden a “humbug,” though very likely he would have acted in the same way himself.

When Hazlemere called the next day in Kensington Gore, Mr. Roden was polite and patronizing.

Nothing succeeds like success.

CHAPTER XLIV.

AT SILVER ASH.

It was after luncheon at Silver Ash, the Tuesday in Easter week. Mr. Harrington had arrived that morning to swell the party, which consisted, besides, of Vere Lorraine, Lord Charles Welby, Malleson, Denman, Mrs. Bennett, Lila Campbell, and Marcia Dene; the former of the two unmarried ladies a *débutante* at last London season;

the latter a handsome brunette of perhaps twenty-four or five.

The guests were scattered about the house, for a light rain was falling which prevented out-door amusements; and Miss Dene had contrived to get hold of Lorraine, who was piloting her through the intricacies of a game of chess. She did not even know the moves, and was not very quick at learning them—perhaps because she was paying much more attention to the teacher than to the game, and she certainly flattered herself that she had made an “impression;” whereas Lorraine in his heart thought the whole business a bore, and would have been quite as ready to teach chess to Lord Charles Welby as to Marcia Dene; while he would have enjoyed a game with Mr. Harrington, who was a good player, better than either. Emilie, meanwhile, looked on with secret amusement, knowing how matters really stood.

“I shall never learn, you know,” said Miss Dene, archly, after she had for the sixth time moved a bishop like a rook, and, by way of compensation, bestowed the knight’s move on a pawn; “it’s so *awfully* difficult.”

“Not the moves, I think,” said Lorraine, smiling; “to become a good player is another thing. No, Miss Dene, the queen can’t jump over heads.”

“Can’t she?—why not? A good player—oh, I shall *never* be that! You are a first-rate player, are you not, Mr. Lorraine?”

“I can’t lay claim to that distinction.”

“Oh, but I’m sure you are. There now, is *that* correct?” placing a rook *en prise* to a pawn.

“Yes, if you want to lose a rook for nothing.”

Marcia tittered, and declared again she should *never* learn, in which opinion Lorraine heartily—though secretly—concurred.

How he prayed for release from his martyrdom! It came in the form of his cousin, who had known Marcia Dene half her life, and stood on no ceremony with her.

“My dear Marcia,” said she, putting her hand on the girl’s shoulder, “you’re victimizing Vere, and you none the better for it. You’ve no head for chess, and Herbert and the others want Vere for billiards. Come with me to make some calls.”

“Am I victimizing you, Mr. Lorraine?” asked Marcia,

looking up at him with that regard she called "under her eyes," whatever that may mean.

Emilie interrupted.

"Now, Marcia, what can a man say when you put him such a question? Run off and get your hat and cloak on; you'll be fully half an hour."

Marcia rose reluctantly, and with a pout.

"I am sure it is very good of you, Mr. Lorraine," she said, "to have made a martyr of yourself for my benefit."

"Nay, Miss Dene, I protest! It was my cousin who crowned me with the martyr's crown."

"And justly," said Emmie, coolly. "Don't I know what you crack players *must* suffer teaching tyros? It's as bad as sitting you down to hear a child of six play her scales."

Marcia stalked away in high dudgeon. The utter ignoring on Emilie's part of the pleasure which a man is supposed to have in playing coach to a pretty girl mortified Miss Dene sorely; but so soon as she was out of sight Lorraine raised his eyes to his cousin, and both laughed.

"Emmie," said the former, "you're a darling!"

"I am not," replied she. "Poor Marcia, I *did* assault her *amour propre* rather roughly; but she is too ridiculous—making a dead set at you in that style. Here comes Herbert to take you off to the billiard-room."

"I wish you were coming too," said Lorraine, as he rose.

"Do you, Vere, when you'll have bonny Lila Campbell to flirt with?"

"You know I would rather have you."

"You're a jewel, Vere!"

She half sighed as she turned away. Was such a man as this to have his life utterly spoiled?

A little later in the afternoon Lorraine, quitting the billiard-room, came across Mr. Harrington, and by a mutual instinct they turned into the picture-gallery hard by, where they paced up and down, talking of many things—politics, music, art, classics.

Presently there was a pause in the conversation, and the priest broke it by a question:

"By the way," he said, "do you mind my asking you something?"

"Why should I? I always feel safe with you, Mr. Harrington."

"Thank you. May I ask, then, if you have taken, or mean to take, any steps toward finding your wife?"

A shiver went through Lorraine at the very word. His wife! It meant to him only a horrible bondage.

"I hardly know," he answered, slowly, "what I shall do in the future. I have done nothing as yet. Of course if I took any steps it would be with a view to getting the marriage set aside, and yet—"

"And yet," repeated Mr. Harrington, covertly watching the handsome face.

Lorraine's eyes were bent to the floor. A slight flush crossed his cheek.

"Well," he said, "it may sound sentimental, but it would seem ungenerous to humiliate that poor child. She did what she did to save my life. She has acted nobly since. A mere sordid adventuress would have claimed me long ago."

"I honor you," said the priest, "for what you call sentimental."

"Still," Lorraine went on, "might not she be glad of release? Even if—if she had cared for me—that is ten years ago; she was a child then, she is a woman now, and her present position is wholly anomalous; she is neither wife nor widow."

"While you," said the priest, "if you were free, what then?"

"You know," said Lorraine, through his teeth, "that I would accept Beryl's fiat as eternal."

He paused, and stood still near one of the long windows.

"If the woman," he said, after a pause, "who calls herself my wife is willing to abjure her rights, she would hardly oppose me in trying to obtain a decree of nullity. I will seek her, and if I find her I will do for her what I can—settle a handsome income upon her—so long as I can be free."

"Do you mean if you fail in obtaining the decree?"

"No," returned Lorraine, gloomily; "what good? Beryl would not consent to that. The law makes Nina my wife; morally, Beryl would be my wife, but legally, no."

"Yet if Beryl consented to it?" asked the priest.

Lorraine was silent, struggling with himself.

"Heaven help me!" he said, at length, "if I were tempted; but I could not do her a wrong."

"I don't think you could, Lorraine," said the priest, gently.

"Ah! don't think better of me than I deserve. No man could be trusted in the face of such temptation. But Beryl would save me. *She* could not do wrong. Yes, I will, I must seek this girl. Your lips are sealed; but I can not endure this bondage. If I can not be free of it—"

He stopped.

"If you can not be free of it?" said Mr. Harrington.

"Don't ask me; don't, for pity's sake!" said Lorraine, hoarsely. "I can't think of the future—I dare not—it maddens me! Come, let us talk of something else."

And the priest said in his heart:

"How will it end? How *can* it end?"

CHAPTER XLV.

LAYING THE TRAIN.

"BERYL, my girl," said Justin Harwood, one morning after his breakfast—hers was over long ago—"I want to have a talk with you."

"Yes," she said, looking up from some flowers she was arranging.

"Well, I'm getting sick of this wretched country—I shall go abroad again."

"That's a very sudden idea," returned Beryl, outwardly unmoved. "Go abroad, where?"

"To America—perhaps—Frisco, or New York; or what do you say to Buenos Ayres?"

"You travel a few thousand miles in two seconds," said the girl, coolly. "I want to know why we must leave England at all. Have you any news of danger?"

"Not I. The trap isn't baited yet that'll catch me," said he, laughing. "Well, look here, it's partly your fault."

"My fault—how?"

"I'll speak plainly, Beryl. When I came over here I'd an idea that matters might be set straight. You know what I mean, and of course, as I told you the other day, it would have been a precious good thing for me. Instead of that, you hold your hand in that affair, and actually drive away custom from this place. I'd have made a pile

out of Gresham but for you, and you keep others from play—you can't deny it."

"I don't wish to deny it," said Beryl, placing a narcissus to best advantage, and proceeding to select a piece of maiden-hair fern.

"Very well, I've got to live; at any rate, I mean to; so as matters are not especially brilliant here, and I'm dead sick of the infernal old country, I shall levant."

"When?"

"Oh! in a fortnight or so."

"We will think about it," said Beryl.

"Think about it? Go to thunder, girl—we'll *do* it!"

Beryl shrugged her shoulders, and went on with her flowers.

Harwood took up a newspaper, and in a few minutes Beryl's flower-vase was filled, and she carried it to its place.

"When did this intention come into your head?" she asked then.

"Some time ago, when I found you meant to stick to your highfalutin notions."

"A fortnight is rather quick time from now to start for New York or Buenos Ayres," remarked Beryl.

"What then? Your lover"—with a sneer—"will be back in town to say good-bye to you."

"He will be up in two or three days."

"I know—" the slightest possible pause; then: "He wouldn't be able to spare the time for a long visit."

"Moreover, Easter visits never are very long," added Beryl, throwing herself into a fauteuil near the open window.

But Harwood had fallen into the trap laid for him. The "I know" had made quite certain what Beryl had more than suspected. The pause, slight though it was, could not escape senses that nothing escaped, and only, with the explanation, made matters worse for Justin.

There was no connection between an assertion of positive knowledge and a general statement; and how did Harwood "know" when Vere Lorraine would return to town? No one had told him; if he had been told he would have been sure to give the name of his informant; besides, the attempt to discount his hasty assertion betrayed conscious

guilt; it was just the mistake of being "too clever by half."

"How did he know it?" Beryl mused, while apparently reading some letters, "and why did he take the trouble to know it. Easily answered. How foolish Justin is to think that at this date he can hoodwink me; he couldn't when I was a child of fourteen. He means to leave England because he has made up his mind for a grand *coup*, more risky than any he has yet perpetrated, and he will time his flight soon enough for safety, and not so soon as to look like flight, and so raise possible suspicion; and that *coup* is to be at Silver Ash.

"He has found out all he needs to know; the plan of the house, who are the guests, and how long they are to stay. He knows that Emilie Gresham and the other ladies have jewels with them—Miss Dene, I know, has splendid jewels. He shall not do this thing. Did I not warn him? Now, happen what may, I will frustrate him. I dare not warn them, for *his* sake. Justin, in his rage, would betray all; but, as Heaven shall help me, there shall be no robbery at Silver Ash.

"If only I could get the plan of the house! But how could I disguise so as to escape possible, even probable, recognition? My only chance is to watch him, and follow him, come worse to worse." She paused in her train of thought, and the next words were grimly significant: "I can use a derringer as well as he can!"

And after? To that Beryl Carolan could not look. Whatever happened, she had no intention of going to either New York or Buenos Ayres, or anywhere else—with Justin Harwood.

She felt that a climax in her life was approaching, but what the result might be she could not foretell. Only this—that she would strive to the uttermost to keep her vow.

That morning a letter came to her from Vere Lorraine. In a few days—he wrote—he should see her again. He was counting the hours, the minutes.

Was not she also? And yet she dreaded that meeting.

"Would it be a sin," she said, inwardly, "to fly—deceiving him for his own sake—and hide myself from him? But I can not now—he is in danger, and he will need me!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

TROUBLE IN KENSINGTON GORE.

THE Rodens did not leave town this Easter. Mr. Roden had an attack of gout, which of course put all locomotion on his part out of the question; and so his wife and the girls remained at Kensington Gore.

May was very sorry for her father, but she had no fanatic desire to go down to Rodenhurst for the Easter recess this year.

Whether she had lost her taste for primroses and the Surrey hills, or made the discovery that Kensington Gardens had put on a new robe of beauty, and supplied all that was needful in the way of rurality, it would, perhaps, be too curious to inquire. Certain it is that she was entirely reconciled to the enforced stay in London. Art was a more than sufficient compensation for the loss of Nature.

As for Enid, all places were alike to her. The girl had fallen into a kind of despondency, none the less difficult to deal with for the occasional flashes of extravagant spirits that outwardly displaced it, but, in reality, gave the girl no relief.

Tortured by jealousy, still persuaded that she had been unjustly treated, Enid's heart fed on itself. If she could have looked her trouble in the face, acknowledged her own mistake, and, however humiliated by the admission of having given love unsought, had set about bravely conquering a passion not returned, earth and sky would have worn different faces for her.

But this was precisely what Enid could not do; to act so would be to change her nature; her affections were strong, but her will weak. Her character was clouded by a veil of sentimentalism, which made her rather hug sorrow than try to put it from her; she positively reveled in "the luxury of woe." She enjoyed being wronged, though she would not have owned it for the world. Pride and jealousy, as well as sentiment, induced her to maintain the fiction that, if Beryl Carolan had not crossed her path, Vere Lorraine's heart would have been given to her; and one or two attempts on May's part to open her sister's eyes to the true state of the case met with a passionate outburst

of tears and reproaches against May herself, which the younger girl naturally resented, and withdrew herself, deciding that Enid must fret out her trouble alone.

But it looked as if the process might fret out Enid's health; she grew thin, pale, and languid; her temper was variable—sometimes passively amiable; at others so irritable that it required no small stock of forbearance to endure it. For three or four days she would not go out at all; then she would go out continually—shopping in the morning; to some at-home concert or *matinée* in the afternoon or a drive in the park, winding up with a dance or a theater in the evening, and returning home thoroughly wearied out, to sleep heavily and late the following morning.

"If only Mr. Harrington were in town," cried Mrs. Roden, one day, to her younger daughter, "I would get him to see Enid. She is killing herself. She will not even see a physician; and, indeed, no physician could do her any good. It is folly to go on like this. Have you talked to her, May?"

"Yes, mamma; and she is only angry with me. You know I told you all along Mr. Lorraine did not care for her—did not really show her any special attention. Emmie says the same, and *she* ought to be able to know when a man is taken with a girl. Besides, if Lorraine was a trifler, so much the less reason for breaking one's heart about him."

"Yes; but if it was Beryl who drew him away—"

"Mamma," cried May, "forgive me; but it was *not* Beryl—I mean, I am sure Beryl never did anything to draw him away! Besides, he was not the least bit in love with Enid. You wouldn't have it, but he wasn't in fault."

"Not consciously, perhaps," said Mrs. Roden, partially, but not entirely, striking her colors; "but I think a man like Mr. Lorraine ought to be more cautious—it is so easy for him to produce a deeper impression than he intends."

"He hasn't enough vanity—that's it," said May; "and Enid is so impressionable—so fond of hero-worship."

Mrs. Roden sighed.

"I must take her away for a change when your father is well," she said. "I can not have her go on like this."

For her own sake she must go away; people will be talking—saying she is dying for Vere Lorraine's sake."

"It is that fear," returned May, "that makes her pluck up as she does now and then; but she always suffers for it afterward."

Only that very day Enid had declared she should go to the theater that evening. A box was taken, and the two sisters went with a married friend and Hazlemere, who was transported to the seventh heaven—not by the play, which he scarcely looked at, but because he was by May's side.

And Enid was beginning to believe she was enjoying herself, when a man and a woman entered the stalls. The man—it mattered nothing who he was; the woman was Beryl Carolan — Beryl, whose dazzling beauty seemed to mock her unsuccessful rival—and from that moment Enid saw only the face and form she almost hated.

But the violet eyes were never raised to the box where the Roden girls sat, though Beryl perfectly well knew they were there, and was sorry she had come to-night, knowing Enid must be pained; and Mrs. Granger, unconscious of the stabs she was dealing, kept talking about Beryl till Enid could have cried out in her passionate anger, but was compelled to endure in silence. So when she got home, she had declared the play stupid and the acting bad; and May was hardly in a position to contradict her, since she, for different reasons, had herself paid but scant attention to the stage.

As for May, how could she help being happy? Had not Ulric Hazlemere as good as told her he loved her before to-night? And to-night, when he was leading her out to the carriage, he bent down and whispered: "Thank you so much, May, for to-night's happiness." "May!" The name came out so naturally, it seemed such a matter of course that somehow May did not even start; but she colored a soft rose tint over her whole face, and just ventured a shy upward glance, to meet a look that made her eyes discover something interesting to study in the bottom furbelows of the dresses trailing before her.

She lay down to rest with a sunny smile on her lips, while poor Enid's pillow was wet with unavailing tears, and Beryl, fully dressed, was pacing slowly and noiselessly

up and down her luxurious chamber, listening, listening, with every nerve on the alert. Listening for what?

CHAPTER XLVII.

TWO TRAVELERS TO BAMPTON.

It was two o'clock in the morning, and quite dark, save for the light, uncertain and glimmering, of the street lamps. A man had just come out of one of the houses in Hanover Street, but no one had seen him. There was not a human creature within sight or sound; all the houses were closed up; and had curious eyes peeped through a blind, they could have discerned nothing of the man's figure more than that it was a man; whether gentle or simple, well-dressed or ill-dressed, impossible to say.

Had inspection been possible, it would have been seen that he was old, with gray hair and a clean-shaved face rough in feature and somewhat lowering in expression. His clothes were shabby and slovenly—a rusty frock-coat of somewhat antiquated make, ditto trousers, a far from clean collar, and a much-worn black silk tie—in short, the general get-up of a workman reduced for a long time past to take his "Sunday best" into common wear, with the result of a general seedy and woe-begone appearance.

He certainly seemed to be more in his element outside a house in Hanover Street than inside. *Que diable allait il faire dans cette galère?* He did not look like a burglar; but in these days of rose-water villains and murderers with the outward semblance of Raphaelic saints, there is no judging by externals.

The man paused a moment or two, looking about him; then he shuffled off, with the slouching gait and dragging step of the British workman out of work.

You might have pitied him had you seen him, thinking him some poor fellow who had, maybe, walked the streets all night; but there were not many people about to notice him, and if there had been, the probability is no one would have given him a second look.

At five o'clock this same man walked into the Midland station at St. Pancras and took a third-class ticket for Bampton, a small market town down the line. He entered a crowded compartment, sat down, drew out his pipe,

and began to smoke and talk with the men about him. Trade was bad? Yes, that it was. He'd been promised a job down at Bampton—caretaker, that was all; but it was better than starving; he'd 'ad enuff o' that 'ere. He'd been bred a bricklayer, but had never done no good at *that* trade, and so on; and by and by he went off to sleep—that was when one or two of the men, bricklayers also, were asking questions. Some people are very reticent about their trade.

Yet, when the "bricklayer" reached Bampton, he went and had some breakfast at an inn, and then retired to a bedroom he had hired, and slept for some hours the "sleep of the just." He seemed in no hurry to look up his caretaker's job; and, indeed, he told the inn-keeper that he was "on the tramp," looking for a job at his own trade; and when he lay down, he said to himself:

"If to-night is only as dark as last night—that's all I want!" which seemed a singular aspiration for a workman on the tramp after a job.

When this man took his ticket for Bampton, he did not notice among the crowd a woman, tall and slight, but carrying herself with a sort of slouching gait, who was close by him. She was quite a poor woman, though tolerably neat. A large white apron almost covered her cotton dress; in lieu of a bonnet, a shawl was on her head, and enveloped the greater part of her person; it was drawn so close round her face that the face itself was scarcely visible; moreover, she held her head down, and seemed dejected in manner. But there was nothing about her to observe.

When the bricklayer was gone, she also took a third-class ticket for Bampton, asking for it in a low voice, and with the strongest Irish brogue. She took her place in the next compartment to the "bricklayer," but went into a corner, and spoke to no one.

At Bampton she kept the bricklayer in sight, and saw him enter the Goat and Compasses, but she herself crossed the road to a very humble hostelry, and there she had a cup of coffee and some biscuits, so seating herself as she took her coffee that she could command the inn over the way.

"Come from Lunnon?" asked the landlady, who was fat and good-natured, as landladies generally are.

"Yes, ma'am," with a half courtesy; "but I was born in Cork, an' me mother's a Limerick woman, an' I'm

come to see my brother, who's workin' yonder, an' maybe I'll get a lift on the road, for it's moighty tired I am."

And a long, rambling story followed, all in Milesian, so rich and full that the landlady couldn't make out a word of it, and had great difficulty by and by in comprehending that the Irish girl wanted a rest, and could she have a room for a bit—she'd pay for't. Oh, she'd pay! and out came some money; not a great deal, but more than enough to satisfy the landlady's charge.

"It must be a front room," stipulated the damsel from Cork; "'tis more loively loike."

"I shouldn't think that would matter, if you want to go to sleep," said the landlady. "However, here's a front room;" and Miss Paddy was ushered into a small apartment and left to herself.

The first thing she did was to lock the door; the next, to fling off the shawl from her head, displaying the red-gold locks and beautiful features of Beryl Carolan!

"I am not an actress for nothing," she muttered. "The task has been comparatively easy so far. The most difficult part is yet to come."

She did not lie down; she went straight to the window, and seating herself so that she was invisible from the outside, watched the Goat and Compasses—watched unflaggingly.

She had wine and biscuits with her, and with these she refreshed herself when needful, but never relaxed her watch.

Once the chamber-maid knocked at the door, and then she answered, sleepily, that she was "all roight, and moighty tired," and the chamber-maid departed satisfied.

So through all the afternoon until the evening came; and then, just as the dusk was falling, a man's figure appeared on the threshold of the Goat and Compasses.

Beryl rose, threw the shawl over her head again, and was down in the bar in less than a minute.

The man was just going—bidding "good-evening" to some men within.

The "Irish girl" had already paid her reckoning; she now bid the landlady a "good-avening, an' good luck to ye, ma'am," and quitted the inn.

The "bricklayer" was going on before her along the High Street. She followed, always keeping a distance

between them—followed through a straggling suburb out into the country. She knew his sight was not so keen and far-reaching as hers; he would not see her in the deepening gloom at a distance which did not prevent her seeing him quite clearly enough to keep him well in view.

So into the dark road, between high hedges, she followed, on to a stretch of common-land, along another road, through half a dozen fields—where she kept close under the hedges—and at last a few glimmering lights showed that a village was near.

It was the village of Strudmore, and a mile beyond Strudmore was Silver Ash.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

IN THE SHRUBBERY.

WELL Beryl knew that no attempt to enter Silver Ash would be made until the household had retired to rest, and operations could, therefore, be conducted with safety.

“But,” mused the girl, “does Harwood already know of a vulnerable point, or is he, to some extent, trusting to chance to find one? I must precede him now, and find out from what point he is likely to approach the house.”

She followed the seeming laborer until she saw him enter a small inn in the village of Strudmore, then she walked on and continued her way to Silver Ash.

The house was surrounded by large, park-like grounds, which extended to within a few hundred yards of the building, the lawn and flower gardens occupying the remaining space.

On the south side was a terrace upon which the windows of the drawing-room and one or two other rooms opened; immediately opposite the west front was a thick shrubbery; on the eastern side were the stables.

It was pitch dark—a night with neither moon nor stars—when Beryl, agile and active, climbed the railings of the park and proceeded toward the house. Every now and then she paused, listening, but there was not a sound save the low sighing of the breeze among the branches, and the soft rustle of her dress against the long grass or bracken.

She soon came in sight of the house opposite the southern front. There were lights shining from the drawing-

room windows, and faint sounds of music reached Beryl's ears as she stood out there in the darkness.

She clasped her hands over her heart.

"Do you dream, Vere," she whispered, "how close I am to you? Does any shadow of your own peril cross you? Ay, he will kill you if he can; he hates you, and he hates me; but I will save you! And then—then for your sake we must part. I must leave you!"

She stood still a moment, covering her face, then, mastering herself, she began cautiously to take a survey of the house, drawing nearer and walking round it. With the exception of the terrace windows, it was not a very accessible house. So far, so good. The girl came presently round to the west front.

All the windows here were dark; the principal one was a large three-light window, the center opening in casement fashion, and about fifteen feet from the ground.

"That is the window Justin will attempt," Beryl decided, "and it is the best approach to the house through the shrubbery. There I will hide myself until he comes."

A terrible vigil; but Beryl was armed for it by the strongest motive the human heart can know, and she was ready for any emergency. The little pistol, on half cock, was ready to her hand. Let the worst come, Justin Harwood's life would weigh nothing in the balance against Vere Lorraine's, or indeed the life of any one in that house.

It was now nearly ten o'clock. Beryl must wait until past midnight. She withdrew into the shrubbery, but remained where the large window was in full view.

Eleven o'clock, and no lights in any of the west-front windows. The servants would be retiring. Clearly, then, none of them slept on this side of the house. Half past eleven, and still darkness. Even guests in the country keep tolerably early hours, but no lights appeared, so no guest-chambers looked over the shrubbery.

"Without doubt," said Beryl to herself, "Justin has fixed on that window. He has, I know, made his plant, and has ascertained that the west side of the house is uninhabited."

Twelve o'clock, and still no sign of Justin's approach. The faintest sound would have reached Beryl's acute ears, and every nerve was listening.

Suddenly a light flashed into her eyes. It was from the

large window opposite. Some one had lighted a lamp that hung from the center of the ceiling. The window was unveiled, and the casement a little open, and Beryl could see the interior of the apartment. It was the library; but who was its occupant?

A thrill of terror went through her as she thought of the man most likely to be a late reader. Another moment and a figure came into view. The light of the lamp fell full upon Vere Lorraine's handsome features!

The girl held her breath. Could she warn him? Was there time? No! Even in that second she heard a rustle, the sound of a stealthy footstep. She crouched back behind a tree; the footstep drew nearer—nearer, halting now and then, as the thief paused to listen, then coming on again. Beryl's hand was on the butt of her pistol. She scarcely breathed.

The step was close to her now—she heard the man's breathing—she saw his stalwart figure; she could have put out her hand and touched him. He stopped, looking toward the window, and chuckled softly.

"So, Vere Lorraine!" he muttered, "you walk into the trap and leave the window open for me."

A sharp click. The ruffian was putting his pistol on full cock.

Lorraine now approached the window, and drew the curtain across it, but left the casement open; and again Justin Harwood chuckled; but now he moved forward, stealthily skirting the shrubbery, and passing the window by.

Still Beryl watched and listened. She had flung off the shawl, which would hamper her movements, and was ready for action. Three minutes—five; and then the footsteps again, and she saw Harwood approaching, carrying a long ladder. He had evidently known where to find it.

Not moving, Beryl watched him approach the house, and as he neared it she followed, creeping behind some tall shrubs which formed outstragglings of the shrubbery. Gently, noiselessly Harwood placed the ladder against the wall; it just reached the window. In that second Beryl violently shook the bush behind which she crouched. Harwood, his foot on the lowest rung of the ladder, started and paused, hearing the sound, but not tracing precisely whence it came. Just that pause, and then he crouched

down suddenly, and passed, swift and silent as a ghost, into the shelter of the shrubbery again.

Now was Beryl's opportunity; her chance depended on a moment, though the dense darkness favored her. Quick as lightning, but as noiseless, she emerged from her hiding-place, was on the ladder—up it—one foot on the window-sill, the other pushed the ladder down, and as it fell with a crash, the girl pushed aside the curtains and sprung into the room.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE ROSE DIAMOND.

“GREAT Heaven—Beryl!”

Well might Lorraine be startled at her sudden appearance at this hour, in a strange and humble guise, with eyes wild, and face all quivering with excitement; but as he flung his arms round her, the girl struggled to be free.

“No—no!” she gasped; “there is danger still. Shut the window—the shutters—quick, quick!”

She seemed half beside herself. Lorraine obeyed her without a word, shut the casement and the heavy shutters, she standing by, trembling from head to foot; then he turned to her, and with a passionate sob she threw herself on his breast.

Perhaps in these moments some suspicion of the hideous truth came to Vere Lorraine; but his first task was to soothe and calm her, who must have risked her life for his. He held her to his breast; he kissed her lips, her brow, her hair; he whispered a thousand words of loving endearment. What must not Beryl, so strong, so self-controlled, have gone through to break down like this!

By and by she grew calmer, and whispered, falteringly:

“Vere, forgive me! They have been hours of torture. I shall be able to tell you now. It has been cruel suspense for you; but I could not speak. Yes, hold me close to your heart, Vere,” kneeling at his feet and clinging to him in a kind of terror still.

“My own love! there is no more danger.”

She drew the pistol suddenly from its hiding-place and laid it down.

“Beryl!” said Lorraine, under his breath.

“I might have need of that, Vere. I would have kill-

ed him if need be!" with a look Harwood had seen more than once, but Lorraine never. He looked steadily into her eyes.

"Killed who?" he said; "Justin Harwood?"

"Yes, Justin Harwood."

"He was here to-night?"

"He came to rob this house, as he robbed Rodenhurst."

Somehow, as it often happens, the actual revelation of the truth, when it came, hardly startled Lorraine. Is it that in the human mind suspicion may exist unsuspected, as things and persons lie *perdu* in the memory, and are brought out in dreams? Certainly, Lorraine had not, until Beryl came to him to-night, connected Harwood's name with the robbery at Rodenhurst; and yet he felt as if some idea of older date than any that flashed into his mind in this hour met its consummation in Beryl's last words.

"Harwood's lameness, then," he said, slowly, "was feigned, to arrest suspicion? It was he who stole Emilie Gresham's jewels?"

"Yes; I warned him then. He planned the robbery here to-night, as a last effort before he left England. He came down days ago and found out all about the house and the people in it. I knew he did, and watched him from that time. He left London this morning, disguised as a workman. I followed him to Bampton; from Bampton I tracked him to Strudmore; then I came on here; and for nearly three hours I watched and waited in that shrubbery. I saw you come into this room, Vere—"

With almost a sob the man bowed his head on hers.

"My darling—oh, my darling!"

"It is all over now," the girl whispered, tremulously.

"Dearest, forgive me—go on!"

She told him how she had seen the ladder placed, and then had startled the would-be robber, and he had fled.

And then, for a long time Lorraine could only hold her to him, in a very agony, at the terrible knowledge of all she had suffered and gone through.

"My soul—my own love!" he said at last, when he could command his voice, "surely the time has come when you must tell me the whole truth—tell me for what motive you lived a life of torture—bore the burden of a crime you had not committed—suffered this accursed

villain to drag you from your rightful place and overshadow your fair name."

But Beryl trembled and was silent.

Lorraine bent over her.

"Beryl, do you think I will let even this come between us?"

The girl started back from his arms, and as she did so something bright sprung from the bosom of her dress—a ray of light shot up in Lorraine's eyes.

With a sudden cry of terror Beryl's hand closed over what in that instant Lorraine had seen to be a ring; but her lover's hand grasped hers. He went livid to the very lips.

"Let me see that ring," he said, hoarsely.

"No, no! Vere, it is my own—you don't doubt me?"

"Doubt you?" But he did not relax his grasp. "But I must see that ring!"

"You can not know it!" Beryl gasped, trying to free her hand, trying to rise; but Lorraine's strong arm held her close, his hand kept hers prisoner.

"Beryl," he said, "don't compel me to use force."

"You can not do that!" said the girl, desperately. "You can not be cruel to me!"

He did not move, but looked steadily into the blue eyes that met his with such anguish of appeal.

"For your own sake!" she whispered, hoarsely.

"Give me that ring, Beryl, or, by Heaven, I will make you!"

She had fought hand to hand, and foot to foot, and defeat had come at last.

She opened her hand, and, shrinking, cowering down, let him take the ring—the ring she kissed with bitter weeping every night and morning, and wore always next her heart—his mother's ring, with the rose diamond and her initials and the Lorraine crest.

It fell from his hand, as, with a passionate cry, he locked the quivering form to his breast.

"Nina, Nina—*my wife!*"

Oh, blind, blind, that he had not dreamed of this before! For him she had borne all the shame and misery and humiliation—for him she would have borne all to the last.

He saw all now—all—and in very delirium of joy he held his young wife to his heart, his lips on hers.

And she, if she had had the physical strength to resist him—how could she shrink from him yet—how do aught but cling about his neck, knowing only that they loved each other, and that she was his and he was hers?

“Mine—mine!” Lorraine whispered, when at last he could speak. “Oh, my soul, how can I repay you for all the years of anguish endured for my sake? My wife—my precious wife! Thank Heaven—oh! thank Heaven! that marriage was no mockery! Now I can claim you before the whole world for my own, and that claim you can not resist!”

“Vere!”

With almost convulsive strength she tried to free herself, but he had her close.

“What,” he said, “do you strive still? My darling, you *must* yield now—the power is mine, and I will use it. All the world shall know that Beryl Carolan is my wife, and that she is innocent of crime. Lift up your face to mine, my heart! Give me the name that is mine—that makes me yours indeed!”

Slowly Beryl raised her head from his breast, and their eyes met.

She drew his face down to hers, and laid her quivering lips to his, and the word that gave him all he claimed was scarcely breathed:

“My husband!”

CHAPTER L.

“SHE IS MY WIFE!”

How long the silence was neither knew; they had no count of time. It was Lorraine who spoke first.

“Tell me, Beryl, about the past—that marriage which I thought a cruel barrier parting you from me?—and it was the golden chain that bound you to me. But first—dearest, did you love me then?”

The crimson swept over the girl’s cheek and brow as she hid her face on her husband’s bosom.

“Yes,” she whispered; “I loved you. That was why I came to you to defend me. I tried to fight against the longing to see you—the sweet hope of being saved by you—but my heart conquered.”

“Thank Heaven!” Lorraine said, under his breath.

“Oh, Beryl! you will not say *now* ‘better we had never met again?’”

“No!” she said, passionately—“no—I *can not* say it!”

She went on presently to tell him how he had been brought wounded to the hut at Barra Creek, and how she had nursed him, sending for Mr. Harrington, who was chaplain at the next settlement; and then Harwood—who called himself Johnson then—thought it would be a fine thing for “Nina” to marry the rich gentleman, and she could only save the life now so precious to her by consenting, but vowed she would never claim the husband upon whom she had been forced. She and Mr. Harrington together contrived his escape, and the priest had faithfully kept to her his promise of secrecy.

“And, Vere,” Beryl went on, “your wife will not, in birth at least, disgrace you. Carolan, you know, is only an assumed name. My father was of gentle blood—Gerald de Clifford, of the old house of Clifford; my mother, Lilian Herbert. He displeased his father by his marriage, simply because my mother was poor; and so they went abroad, and led a wandering kind of life. My father died when I was still very young. My mother was in dire poverty when Harwood, as he called himself then, came across her, and he soon persuaded her to marry him for my sake. Thank Heaven, she died before she found out the full measure of his infamy—that he was not only a dishonest gamester, but a thief, burglar. So I fell into his hands, and it was when a great robbery he had committed made Europe dangerous for a time that he went to Australia. He had no part in shooting you. You were left for dead when he and I found you; but from the time of that marriage he kept me in his power by threatening to reveal the truth to you; and though I had him even yet more in my power, yet he knew I would keep silence for your sake—the more when I knew you loved me; for then you would claim me—as you have done now.”

“Ay, that would I; and every shadow shall be cleared from your name, my wife. Not even for your mother’s sake shall this dastard be spared. Tell me who and what he really is, Beryl?”

“When at my trial,” Beryl answered, “you cross-examined Mr. Roden, you elicited the fact that he had had a *vaurien* brother—”

"Beryl! Harwood is Anthony Roden?"

"Yes. He wrote to me that he meant to rob the Rodenhurst diamonds. There was no time—he meant there should not be—to reply, and tell him I would not countenance the theft. All I could do was to do my best to save him from detection; that was how it was. Enid found me so close to the room where the jewels were kept. The bulk of these jewels can not be recovered; but I managed to secure some that were valued as heir-looms, pretending that I would have them reset, and wear them. I hoped that one day I might be able to restore them, and that day has come."

Lorraine held the girl to him for a minute in silence; then he rose quickly.

"But Roden will escape," he said.

He went and opened the shutters; it was broad dawn.

At that moment a confused sound was heard outside the library—the sound of several voices and approaching footsteps.

"Vere!" Beryl exclaimed, hurriedly, "something has happened!"

Lorraine drew her behind the curtains, and closed them, and went toward the door; but it was opened from without, and he saw Mr. Harrington, Gresham, and one of the gardeners.

"Ah, Lorraine!" cried Gresham, "we were searching for you. James has just caught a man lurking in the shrubbery; he seized the fellow, who attacked him, and James contrived to stun him."

"Where is the man?" asked Lorraine. "Has any one seen him?"

"Not yet. James left him, and came to give the alarm—a burglar, of course, and there's a ladder lying under this window."

"Yes," said Lorraine, "I know it."

"You know it?" gasped Gresham.

Beryl pushed aside the curtain and stepped out into the room.

"Beryl Carolan—here!" fell from Gresham's lips.

The priest set his teeth, but said not a word. The gardener simply stared.

Lorraine flung his arm round the girl's form and drew her to his side.

“Yes,” he said, “here, at the risk of her own life, to save mine, as she saved it ten years ago. Beryl Carolan is my wife!”

CHAPTER LI.

ANTHONY RODEN.

It was a strange scene on which the light of the early morning fell. Anthony Roden—to call him by his real name—had been carried to one of the men-servant’s bedrooms in the basement, and laid there, for Mr. Harrington had said he had not many hours to live. The blow given by the gardener had been sure and strong, and the ill-spent life was closing fast.

By the bed-head the priest sat; by the bedside stood Lorraine and his young wife, and at the foot Emilie, hastily summoned, sat, her husband standing by her.

When Roden’s senses first returned to him, and the priest urged him to make full confession of his guilt, he refused.

“Not I,” he said; “the girl’s brought me to this; she can get out of it the best way she can.”

“It will make little difference to her,” Mr. Harrington answered, calmly. “She can prove her innocence without your help. But you have nothing to gain by silence, and may as well do this one act of justice.”

The dying man mused a little; then a sudden light gleamed in his eyes; the strange pride of the criminal took possession of him.

“All right,” he said, “I don’t care if I do tell all about it. I’ve been successful up to now—ha! ha! You none of you guessed I was shamming lame, eh?—a capital dodge. But the great thing was not to have an accomplice—that’s it. Do your own work. You’re going to take it down, eh?” seeing the paper before Mr. Harrington and the pen in his hand.

“Yes, I am going to take it down.”

“All right. My stuck-up brother won’t like the notion of his brother being a burglar, will he?”

He had to rest a little before he went on; and then, pausing now and then, having many times to be kept up with restoratives, he confessed the robbery at Rodenhurst, and at Esher, and the theft of Emilie Gresham’s jewels;

and he was proceeding with that hideous vanity—ininitely more horrible in a dying man—to describe similar “operations,” as he called them abroad, when the priest sternly checked him, saying that no more was needed, and that he had only to sign the document already written out. He obeyed, being propped up by the priest to do so, and signed his own name, “Anthony Roden,” and as he dropped the pen and was laid back, he said:

“I haven’t signed that name for many a year.”

They were the last articulate words he spoke. After that he muttered sometimes, his mind wandering to past occurrences in his evil life; but long before he died Lorraine had taken Beryl from the room, and Emilie made the girl go with her to her own apartments. Mr. Harrington and Lorraine remained with Roden until the last.

It was nearly eight o’clock when there was a gentle tap at Emilie’s dressing-room door.

“Come in,” Emilie said, and Lorraine entered.

Mrs. Gresham was sitting in a fauteuil; Beryl, temporarily appareled in a dressing-robe of Emilie’s, was sitting at her hostess’s feet.

Emilie got up, and drew Lorraine forward.

“This is your place,” she said, smiling. “No—no resistance; sit there, and I will take this place,” indicating another fauteuil.

Lorraine obeyed, and drew his wife close to him. That was all she needed now—just to rest within his arms; it was to her such a heaven as only one tried as she had been could know—a peace like that of the ransomed spirit set free from the trammels of clay.

Lorraine stooped and kissed the white brow, and for some moments there was a silence which no one cared to break.

When Lorraine spoke it was with an effort.

“Harwood is dead,” he said. “He died twenty minutes ago.”

Emilie shuddered; but Beryl drew a quick breath, but did not move.

“A terrible death!” said Emilie in a low tone.

“Ay; but men who have lived such lives generally die as they lived. We must telegraph to Mr. Roden, Emmie—with your permission.”

“Do whatever you think right, Vere,” said his cousin.

"Herbert, I know, is of one mind with me; and, of course, painful though it will be to Mr. Roden, the whole truth must be known."

"Certainly; Beryl's name is before and above every other consideration. She shall not be misjudged one hour longer than I can help."

Another tap, and Herbert Gresham came in.

Beryl looked up with a smile, and gave him her hand.

He stooped and kissed it reverently.

"Herbert," said his wife, "will you see that a telegram is sent at once to Mr. Roden?"

"Yes; I will dispatch a mounted groom in ten minutes."

"Thanks so much. And please ask Mr. Harrington to come here, and return yourself. Beryl and Vere both wish you and me to know all. I wanted to wait, but Beryl will not have it so."

"No," Beryl said; "I shall feel happier when you know the full truth."

And Herbert Gresham went out.

Beryl Carolan, Vere Lorraine's wife, that was all he knew at present. When and where had the marriage taken place?

Fortunately the party at Silver Ash broke up that day.

The astonished guests heard from their hostess the strange story of last night and of the past; but they did not see Beryl, and all had departed before the afternoon, when Mr. Roden arrived at Silver Ash, marveling greatly why he was sent for.

He was shown straight into the library, and in two minutes Lorraine entered the room.

"Mr. Roden," he said, "I have a very painful disclosure to make to you; I will not keep you in suspense longer than I can help. Last autumn your family diamonds were stolen, as you believed, by Beryl Carolan. I succeeded in proving by negative evidence that she was innocent. I have now the positive evidence."

"You mean," exclaimed Mr. Roden, "that you have found the thief?"

"He is lying dead in this house, Mr. Roden. He attempted a robbery here and failed—through Beryl Carolan."

"Through—Beryl—Carolan?"

"She suspected him, followed him, frustrated him. The robber was her step-father, Justin Harwood—your brother—Anthony!"

"*What!*" Mr. Roden sprung to his feet as if shot. "My brother!—impossible—he died abroad—fifteen years ago!"

"He died this morning," said Lorraine, quietly. "Stay! Do you know this signature?"

He held out a paper.

Mr. Roden took it in his shaking hands and looked at the autograph. The paper fell, and Mr. Roden stared blankly at his questioner.

"Well," said the other, "you know it?"

"It looks like Anthony's writing, but—"

"Come with me," said Lorraine. "You may recognize the man."

Mr. Roden followed without a word to the room where the dead man lay. He looked, started, looked more closely, and staggered back against the wall.

"It *is* Anthony!" he muttered, brokenly. "Great Heaven! it *is* my brother!"

Lorraine led him away. He was trembling like a child, and it was some time before he was able to read the confession of the wretched man for whose sin another had suffered.

"How should I dream of this?" muttered Mr. Roden, brokenly. "How should I dream of it? But this—this crime—you will not publish it?"

"You forget that the cloud still rests on Beryl's name. For her sake the truth must be known."

"But my children—" began the other.

"They must suffer!" said Lorraine, sternly. "Were Beryl no more to me than she was the day she came to me to defend her, justice should be done. She is dearer to me than life itself. On his head who did the crime let the shame rest."

And Mr. Roden was silent. What could he say?

CHAPTER LII.

THE LAST ACT OF THE DRAMA.

OF course for awhile the world talked of nothing else but the extraordinary facts brought to light by the con-

fession of Anthony Roden and the attempt to rob Silver Ash. No romance ever written equaled that real romance of the Barra Creek marriage, and the wonderful heroism of the woman who, for her husband's sake, endured a life of misery and the shame of a crime not committed. But so soon as Lorraine had taken steps to give the necessary publicity to the truth, he took his young wife abroad with him, to remain away until the first excitement had passed. They wanted only each other as yet, to be "far from the madding crowd," peace, rest, love—nothing more!

And Enid? It was a rude shock to her to know how deeply she had wronged Beryl, but she was not sorry that they did not meet before Beryl left England.

"When she returns," Enid said to her sister, "I may be able to meet her; but just now I don't feel as if I could."

The Rodens themselves went abroad for a few months, and when they returned, Ulric Hazlemere was one of their first visitors.

"What!" May said to him, softly, "you do not shrink from the disgrace that has come upon our name?"

"The disgrace is not yours, May, and if your father will give you to me—"

But May would not let him finish the sentence. The next day, however, Hazlemere wrote a long letter to Lorraine at Sorrento.

The world was at Beryl Lorraine's feet once more when she and her husband came back to London. Great people maneuvered for invitations to her *salon*. Not to know her was to argue yourself unknown. She reigned unrivaled. But she smiled and shrugged her shoulders, counting all the homage at its worth.

"I love very few people," she would say to her husband—"May Hazlemere, and Emilie, and Father Bernard."

"Does that end the list?" he said to her one day, laughing and drawing her to him. "Am I outside the circle?"

"You, Vere?" She laid her golden head on his breast. "It seems meaningless to say 'I love you,' when I can say it to others. You I worship. You are my life—my whole existence!"

"And you," he said, pressing his lips on hers, "are mine!"

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